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GAY FREEDOM: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMING OUT

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GAY FREEDOM: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMING OUT

University of Montana

PH.D. 1980

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GAY FREEDOM: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMING OUT

by

Robert James Kus

B.A., Cleveland State University, 1968

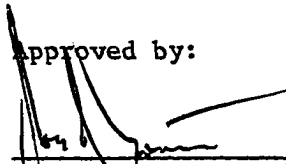
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Dean, Graduate School

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Kus, Robert James, Ph.D., (August 4, 1980)

Sociology

Gay Freedom: An Ethnography of Coming Out (416 pp.)

Director: Jon Driessen, Ph.D.

The purpose of this study is to show that the coming out process experienced by gay Americans is a systematic and observable life process consisting of stages having profound consequences for the gay person's identity and self-esteem.

Data consisted of thirty-one in-depth interviews conducted in Missoula, Montana and Seattle, Washington with twenty-six gay men and five lesbians, gay studies literature, and other sources such as music, poetry, cartoons.

The four stages of coming out are: identification, cognitive changes, acceptance, and action.

In Stage I, the individual recognizes gay identity. Due to many factors, this stage may be very frightening and guilt-producing; this can lead to problems such as depression, alcohol abuse, and suicidal ideation.

Stage II sees the gay person exploring the gay world and ridding self of negative preconceived notions about what gays are like. Passing as straight, which here is called "closet passing," is a common feature of this stage.

Stage III is acceptance of self in a positive light which leads to a healthy self-esteem. The hallmark of this stage is a special type of freedom from guilt, fear, hiding - a gay freedom. This freedom manifests itself in honesty, candidness, relaxation, energy release, etc.

Stage IV is action such as disclosure of gay identity, choosing new friends, working in the gay movement. An in-depth examination of "telling the family" is included to give the reader a clearer idea of the dynamic nature of the action stage of the coming out process and how it affects the gay's biographical others.

A few areas for future research in gay studies sociology are given at the end of the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Gay Freedom" was completed thanks to many persons past and present who provided me personal support and help during the construction and writing of this book. My heartiest thanks go to:

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LIST OF TABLESTables.

1.	Informants at a glance.	8
2.	Formal Education in Years of Informants	9
3.	Religious Affiliation at Time of Interviews	9

An Introductory Poem - "For Constantine Cavafy"

Reading your book
I see you now
again in your Alexandria
leaning
toward the window of a shop
where the light
catches the dust and touches
the features of a young man within. Watching,
you catch sight of your reflection
mottled in the glass,
and move away,
last words of a poem
rising to your mind:
 "Later, in a happier time,
 a man just like me
 will appear, and act freely."
Sometimes,
remembering my silences,
my lost moments,
the line of burnt-out candles,
I despair with you, Cavafy.
And then, sometimes,
I think: this is that happy time;
I am the man.

Ian Young, 1977

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	i
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
INTRODUCTORY POEM	v

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. PROCEDURES	4
Sponsorship and Gaining Entry	
Persons and Places	
Sampling	
Field Roles of the Participant Observer	
The Formal Interview	
Analysis	
Multi-source Use of Data	
Field Notes	
The Question of Validity and Reliability	
The Quest for Objectivity	
Ethical Considerations	
III. COMING OUT AND ITS DIMENSIONS.....	35
Preliminary Concept Definitions	
Toward a Definition of Coming Out	
The Qualitative Nature of Coming Out	
Notes on the Quantitative Dimensions of Coming Out	
IV. IN THE CLOSET - IDENTIFICATION	75
Notes on the Concept of Stages	
Looking Back to Childhood	
Preconceived Notions	
Opposite-Sex Experiences	
Identifying Self as Gay	
Female-Male Differences	
Guilt	
Not Wanting to be Gay	

Special Problems
Getting Ready for Stage II

V.	THE CLOSET DOOR OPENS - COGNITIVE CHANGES.....	155
	The Concept of Passing	
	Why Pass?	
	How to Pass	
	The Geographic Dimension	
	Negative Aspects of Closet Passing	
	Changing Conceptions	
	Opening the Closet Door	
VI.	OUT OF THE CLOSET - ACCEPTANCE AND ACTION.....	212
	Gay Freedom - Acceptance	
	Getting On with It - Action	
VII.	COMING OUT AS A FAMILY AFFAIR.....	257
	Coming Out as the Ideal	
	No Thanks! - Deciding Not to Come Out to Family	
	Unspoken Assumptions	
	Coming Out Approaches	
	Planning the Event	
	Timing or "Why Now?"	
	Some Initial Reactions	
	Interactional Changes	
	A Note about Siblings	
VIII.	A FEW RESEARCH AREAS FOR THE FUTURE.....	337
IX.	SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS.....	348
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	351
	APPENDICES.....	363

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

...it was all a bit like the time when Martin Luther King surveyed that vast flock of blacks in Washington. We, too, had been to the mountain top and we are not turning back; we had tasted the sweet morsel of glory and it was good...to sit in the shade with one's friends after it was all over in the evening's glow; it was glory, indeed. And man, it was beautiful! (Liechti, 1970, p. 3)

It began like any other muggy summer Friday night. People all over America were leaving their offices and workplaces to relax and unwind for the weekend. Little did they know, however, that this night held a surprise, a surprise which would forever change the social landscape of America.

The happening occurred in a small tavern called The Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in New York's Village. Sometime after midnight in the early morning hours of Saturday, June 28th, 1969, police conducted a "routine" raid on the Stonewall. Raids on gay bars and taverns were traditional Americana, a standard oppressive action which gays lived with as a matter of course.

This raid was different, very, very different. Instead of allowing the police harrassment to progress peacefully, the gays fought back in the early morning hours that Saturday. The same happened Saturday night as the crowds grew in number, in strength, and in unity. This happening became known as The Stonewall Rebellion, the Boston Tea Party of the gay movement.

And from this event, two groups were formed, the Gay Liberation Front and, a bit later, the Gay Activists Alliance. These militant groups began fighting back against anti-gay oppression so commonly meted out to gay

Americans. These groups began replacing the older, more staid "homophile" groups as the movers and shakers of the American gay world. The gay liberation movement was born to continue early "homosexual" rights movements in Europe decimated by Hitler in Germany and Stalin in Communist Russia as well as to expand on the earlier "homophile" movement in America.

With the phenomenal growth of the gay liberation movement, more and more gays felt free to "come out of the closet" as a manifestation of a new gay pride.

This study, then, is an exploration of the concept and process of coming out for the individual. I will demonstrate that the coming out process, which is experienced by 20,000,000 gay Americans, is neither random nor unsystematic. Rather, as we will see, that process is observable and systematic.

Chapter Two discusses the naturalistic procedures used in this ethnography. Data are gained from 31 in-depth interviews as well as from the literature.

In Chapter Three, we'll see the dimensions of coming out on a societal level as well as some definitions of coming out.

Chapter Four, "In the closet," explores Stage I of the coming out process, identification. This stage, as will be seen, occurs when the gay person recognizes his or her gay identity (Who am I?) and is a stage often characterized by guilt and fear. This guilt leads to lowered self-esteem (What am I worth?) which can lead to many problems such as alcohol abuse, depression, and others.

Chapter Five, "The closet door opens," discusses the second stage of coming out, cognitive changes. It will be shown that in this stage, the

gay person begins to rid self of the negative preconceived notions she or he had about what gays were like. This is accomplished mainly through contact with other gays and is seen as necessary for a healthy self-esteem to develop.

In Chapter Six, "Out of the closet," we'll look at Stages III and IV, acceptance and action respectively. Acceptance, or gay freedom, provides the gay with a positive self-image and allows for many benefits. Action is the logical extension of acceptance. In this chapter, the reader will be introduced to many concepts and ideas which, in turn, lead to several interesting research questions for the future.

Chapter Seven is presented to give the reader one example of the action stage of coming out, disclosure. To do this, we look at the fascinating ways gays choose to tell their families their gay identities.

In Chapter Eight, I provide gay studies' scholars with some ideas for future research which have been generated by this work.

And finally, Chapter Nine gives a summary and conclusions section to this work.

In the back of "Gay Freedom," the reader will find a number of Appendices. Two of them are of particular interest to the average reader - A and I. Appendix A gives a brief biographical sketch for each informant in this work, while Appendix I shows some examples of interview data before my analysis.

Cartoons from CHRISTOPHER STREET, reflecting some of the concepts discussed in this work, are scattered throughout the text.

With this introduction, we now turn to the ethnographic procedures used in creating "Gay Freedom".

CHAPTER TWO - PROCEDURES

*It's good to be a seeker,
But sooner or later you have to be a finder.
And then it is well to give what you have found, a gift
into the world for whoever will accept it.
(Jonathan Livingston Seagull)*

The methodology, or the procedures used in the research process, is logically related to the theoretical framework. Consequently, because this study is grounded in the symbolic interactionist perspective, qualitative methods of the ethnographer have been employed. A naturalistic perspective is necessary in getting at grounded theory, and qualitative methods, or doing field research, is the only method package which can uncover the data which is needed for a good descriptive ethnography.

As Schatzman and Strauss point out,

For the naturalistically-oriented humanist, the choice of method is virtually a logical imperative. The researcher must get close to the people whom he studies; he understands that their actions are best comprehended when observed on the spot - in the natural, ongoing environment where they live and work. If man creates at least some of the conditions of his own actions, then it can be presumed that he acts in his own world, at the very place and time that he is. The researcher himself must be at the location, not only to watch but also to listen to the symbolic sounds that characterize this world. A dialog with persons in their natural situation will reveal the nuances of meaning from which their perspectives and definitions are continually forged. (1973, pp. 5-6)

Sponsorship & Gaining Entry.

Because the ethnographer becomes so close to his/her informants through in-depth interviewing and participation to various extents in the social settings of the informants through time, gaining entry and sponsorship is crucial. This acceptance process must be accomplished

for the research process to start off and continue on firm ground. Should acceptance not be fully granted to the ethnographer, problems ranging from withholding certain information to sabotage of the research can occur.

In this study, sponsorship was easily obtained from my informants. The informants, or those with whom I conducted in-depth interviews as opposed to informal informants, were interviewed from two different locations - Missoula, Montana and Seattle, Washington. (Details of the persons will be discussed more fully in the next section of the chapter.)

First, a discussion of sponsorship in Missoula. In 1975, I taught two senior-level sociology courses at the University of Montana called The Gay American. Because of the nature of the subject matter, the students of the courses opted to hold classes outside of the classroom setting. Fraternity and sorority houses, the forests outside the city, the Newman Center, and private homes all hosted our classes. Students often chipped in money to provide beer during the seminars, thus facilitating discussion. As a result of the popularity and notoriety of the courses on a university and state level, many gay persons flocked to the course seminars. In the first quarter, for example, the number of students registered was 29 while the attendance often exceeded 100. One class' project, hosting Rev. Troy Perry, drew a crowd of over 1,100. During the process of the 2 quarters, the students founded an association called Lambda which was designed to be a social, educational, and political group for gay rights. Also during these 2 quarters, many of my students "came out" publically for the first time, introduced me to many of their gay friends not in my classes, and presented with me educational panels on gay lifestyles to the various high school and university classes

interested in our work. It was from this group of people that the initial six persons were chosen for in-depth interviewing to give me enough data to compose the proposal for this study. Also, because of the state-wide publicity which was generated from the course, numerous folks - from cowboys to housewives - from around the state began calling me for counseling about their gay identity and problems associated with being gay in rural America. Thus, much information was gleaned from these informal interviews.

The second set of informants was interviewed in Seattle. These persons - 25 in all - were gathered from among friends of mine, coworkers who were gay, persons I met while working for the SEATTLE GAY NEWS, the Gay Community Center of Seattle, and Triangle Recreation Camp, and finally from informants' referrals of their lovers, friends or acquaintances.

In Seattle, informal interviews were gathered from persons who had an interest in this research project and from others' conversations at gay bars, taverns, restaurants, parties, lunches and board meetings. Many, for example, when learning of this project, talked at length about their own coming out, that of spouses' gay identities, or that of friends.

In "Gay Freedom," then, the problem of sponsorship was nonexistent. In fact, I found that the gay community was most cooperative with social research and overwhelmingly responsive to being interviewed. Several persons responded to my request for an interview with statements such as, "I was sure hoping you would ask me!" In all my requests for formal interviews, there was only one person who declined. His response was,

I'd really like to help you in your research, Bob, but my coming out was so painful to me and to my family, that I'd probably cry during the whole thing. Even though I came out years ago, the pain of it is as fresh now as if it occurred yesterday. I hope you understand.

Persons and Places.

Formal interviews were conducted with a total of 31 persons, six lesbians and 25 gay men.¹ In the Missoula sample, my informants were young and mostly in the early stages of coming out. All were native Montanans, except for Helena, and all were college-educated except for Terry. All but Bob were actively involved in gay studies either as students, as listeners in the seminars, or active in Lambda, and all were actively searching through the gay literature available to them to learn more about the gay liberation movement and what it means to be gay in America. These interviews were conducted in 1975 at my Missoula apartment. [See Appendix A for a thumbnail biographical sketch of informants who were interviewed formally.]

The Seattle interviews were conducted mostly in 1978 and 1979 in my home, homes of the informants, or in offices of the informants. Unlike my Missoula informants, the Seattle group was broader-based in terms of age, states in which they were born, and occupationally.

As can be seen from Table #1 on Page 8, ages of all informants

¹ A major criticism of sociological and gay studies research is that the emphasis is usually on men to the exclusion of women. To this, I would respond that this study should be viewed as the first of a series I will do in this field, and that studies with greater emphasis on women may be done in the future by this writer. Further, I found that the coming out process and family relationships are basically the same for men and women except in the time dimension; women often come out later in life than men. Most differences between men and women are seen in the social consequences of coming out rather than in the process itself, e.g., the greater tendency towards coupling seen in women after coming out. Some differences between gay men and women are now being explored and can be seen in Bell & Weinberg's *HOMOSEXUALITIES: A STUDY OF DIVERSITY AMONG MEN AND WOMEN*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978.

Table #1 - Informants at a glance

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>State Born</u>	<u>Occupation at time of interview</u>
Trent	28	Georgia	laborer
Ethan	32	Illinois	social worker
Skip	31	Indiana	Armed Forces paramedic
Xavier	33	Washington	hair stylist
Cimarron	31	Idaho	field rep for boys' group
Marty	23	West Virginia	vocational counselor
Donovan	26	Illinois	banker
Lance	25	Pennsylvania	unemployment determiner
Rev. Troy	54	California	minister-counselor-pastor
Casey	66	Texas	retired railroad person
Vincent	34	Minnesota	public relations person
Tim	47	California	gay bar owner
Cliff	52	Washington	auditor
Mark	39	New Jersey	national gay leader
Mike	41	Washington	unemployed postal worker
Lonny	30	Washington	journeyperson cutter
Jon	43	New Jersey	forester
Tony	23	Maryland	mechanics student
Rev. Eric	52	Idaho	minister-counselor
Paris	25	Kansas	retail asst. manager
Dr. Luke	44	Tennessee	psychiatrist
Bob	25	Montana	criminal justice counselor
Monty	21	Montana	theater student
Mitch	20	Montana	gay activist organizer
Fabian	20	Montana	business student
Terry	20	Montana	jack-of-all-trades
Carol	35	Maryland	nurse counselor
Evelyn	29	Wisconsin	clinical audiologist
Rita	28	Ohio	psychology student
Sr. Theresa	39	California	nun/religious educ. coordinator
Helena	21	Missouri	farm laborer

ranged from 20 to 66 with the mean age being about 33½ years. Educationally, the span ranged from a high school diploma to a doctorate with the mean number of formal schooling years being 14.35. (See Table #2.)

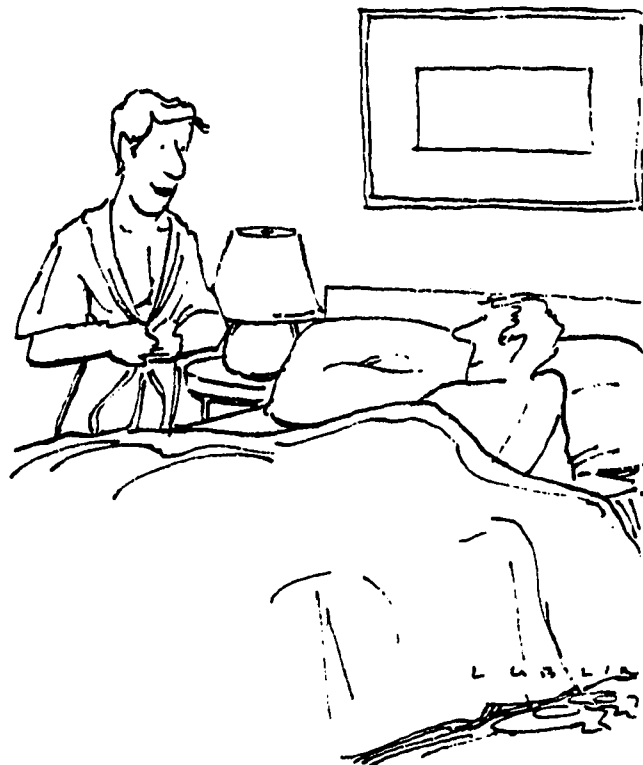
Table #2 - Formal Education in Years of Informants

High school diploma	2
Post high school training	3
Some college	5
Professional diploma (R.N.)	1
Bachelor's degree	15
Master's degree	4
Doctorate	1

Religion of the informants was also asked to determine whether or not religious beliefs changed as a result of coming out. "Religious preference at age 13" and "current religious affiliations" were asked. The results of this will be discussed more fully in the study, but for now, see Table #3 for the religious affiliations listed as current at the time of the interview.

Table #3 - Religious Affiliations at Time of Interview

Unaffiliated	11
Roman Catholic	6
Agnostic	4
Protestant Episcopal	3
Metropolitan Community Church	3
"Christian"	1
"General Protestant"	1
"Non-practicing Jew"	1



*"Last night I dreamt that Johnny Carson stopped asking
gay entertainers when they were getting married."*

Finally, despite the fact that the interviews were conducted in only two geographical locations, informants hailed from 18 different states. [See Table #1.] The role of geographic mobility as part of the coming out process for many individuals can be seen in these statistics and will be further explored in the substantive part of this work.

Sampling.

The purpose of an ethnography is to portray a people or a life process of a particular group of people as accurately as possible (Ehrich, 1970, pp. 542-543). The mandate of ethnographers, then, could be said "to make society (and/or culture) visible " (Driessen, 1974). Examples of the first type of ethnography, the portrayal of a people, abound in cultural anthropology and, to a lesser extent, in sociology. Examples of this type of ethnography can be seen in works such as YOU OWE YOURSELF A DRUNK: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF URBAN NOMADS by James Spradley (1970), NUDIST SOCIETY by Hartman, Fithian and Johnson (1970), STATIONS OF THE LOST: THE TREATMENT OF SKID ROW ALCOHOLICS by Jacqueline Wiseman (1970), or in Esther Newton's MOTHER CAMP: FEMALE IMPERSONATORS IN AMERICA (1972).

The second type of ethnography - of which this work is one - studies life processes and reports them in depth. This kind of ethnography is gaining in popularity and can be seen in such works as ON DEATH AND DYING by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969), PASSING ON: THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF DYING by David Sudnow (1967), and in Glaser and Strauss' AWARENESS OF DYING (1965).

Also, because the purpose of this ethnography is to generate substantive theory and discuss formal sociological theory,¹ sociological or theoretical sampling was employed. Theoretical sampling

...is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal. The initial decisions for theoretical collection of data are based only on a general subject or problem area [e.g., how do gay persons come out and what are the consequences for individual self-esteem.] The initial decisions are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45)

In this study, then, persons were chosen to be formally interviewed solely on the basis of their gay identity, their knowledge of coming out in their own lives, and their willingness to be interviewed. After having interviewed 31 persons, I discovered that my categories were saturated, or fully explained and documented, and consequently to interview more persons would lead to no further useful data.

¹Glaser and Strauss describe the differences between "formal" and "substantive" theory in this way:

By substantive theory, we mean that developed for a substantive, or empirical, area of sociological inquiry, such as patient care, race relations, professional education, delinquency, or research organizations. By formal theory, we mean that developed for a formal, or conceptual, area of sociological inquiry, such as stigma, deviant behavior, formal organization, socialization, status congruency, authority and power, reward systems, or social mobility. (1967, p. 32)

In this study, formal theory is seen in the discussion of the handling of stigma and radical identity transformations. The substantive areas discussed are the specific realities of the coming out process for the gay individual which may, or may not, be seen in other radical identity change processes such as dying.

Field Roles of the Participant Observer.

In the process of creating an ethnography, the sociologist interacts with informants and their social worlds in varying degrees of intimacy and detachments. Based on the thinking of Buford Junker (1952), Raymond Gold, in his doctoral dissertation titled "Toward a social interaction methodology for sociological field observation" (1954), developed 4 theoretically possible roles for sociologists conducting field work. These roles

...range from the complete participant at one extreme to the complete observer at the other. Between these, but nearer the former, is the participant-as-observer; nearer the latter is the observer-as-participant. (p. 30)

In this study, 3 of the 4 research roles were used to some extent, the most frequent being the "participant-as-observer" role. In this section, I discuss the characteristics of each of the roles in terms of their use or non-use in "Gay Freedom."

The complete participant role is one in which the true identity and purpose of the researcher are not known to those whom s-he observes. Role pretense on the part of the scientist is the basic theme of this role (Gold, 1969, pp. 33-34). Examples of this type of research are Laud Humphreys' TEAROOM TRADE: IMPERSONAL SEX IN PUBLIC PLACES (1970), Festinger, Riechen and Schacter's WHEN PROPHECY FAILS (1965), and Lofland and Lejeune's "Initial interaction of newcomers in Alcoholics Anonymous " (1960).

Although not stated in Gold's article, this type of cloak-and-dagger research assumes that the researcher's participation in the social activities of persons is done for the purpose of data gathering for a

study, be it journalistic or scientific. Thus, a former prison inmate or former nun who write of their experiences in prison or in the convent are not engaging in the complete-participant research role if their original intent in becoming a prisoner or nun was not to do research.

In this study, the complete participant role was never used; my interactions and participation at gay parties, in board meetings of gay groups, in visiting with gay friends and colleagues, socializing in gay taverns and bars and restaurants, consulting gay groups, and the like, were never done with the primary notion of data gathering. Rather, the knowledges gained while participating in gay settings - such as learning the latest gay lingo - were an after-the-fact reflection source of data for the study.

Further, it is my belief that this role, which I call the "cloak-and-dagger" method and which Kai Erickson calls "disguised observation," is almost always inherently unethical in sociological ethnographic research¹ and very frequently dangerous.²

¹See Kai Erickson's "A comment on disguised observation in sociology," in Filstead's QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY: FIRSTHAND INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SOCIAL WORLD. Chicago: Markham Pub. Co., 1970, pp. 252-260.

²Unlike the participant-as-observer and the observer-as-participant field roles, the researcher is given no "special considerations" as a researcher in the complete participant role. Consequently, should one's "cover" be blown, persons can become offended at one's lack of informing them of the research and get the feeling of being "used." Threats or harm may result. An example of this occurred when, as part of a course in field work as a naive beginning Ph.D. student, I engaged in such a role. When my cover was blown, paranoia developed in the community, friendships were nearly shattered permanently, and anger was rampant. Further, my life was threatened. The individual who threatened to drown me in a river proved himself capable of such an act one week later by killing one of his family members. [Fortunately, the killing was not in any way related to my research!]

The participant-as-observer role is one in which the field worker and informant know that theirs is a field relationship. As Gold says,

Probably the most frequent use of this role is in community studies, where an observer develops relationships with informants through time, and where he is apt to spend more time and energy participating than observing. At times he observes formally, as in scheduled interview situations; and at other times he observes informally - when attending parties, for example. During early stages of his stay in the community, informants may be somewhat uneasy about him in both formal and informal situations, but their uneasiness is likely to disappear when they learn to trust him and he them. (1969, p. 35)

Although not stated, Gold assumes that the participation done in social settings is done for the purpose of research. In my study, the social participation was not done as a deliberate part of the research act. Rather, as a result of participation with fellow gays in non-research-oriented settings, I chose informants for formal interviews because of their availability, their knowledges, and time considerations. 26 out of the 31 persons used in formal interviews were obtained in this manner. Friends, coworkers, and social acquaintances were the informants in this group.

In one particular social group, for example, I was serving as an official representative of an umbrella organization to one of its satellite groups to improve communication between the groups, help in the formulation of a set of by-laws for the satellite group, and generally give counsel when needed. Meetings were held over a period of many months, and the meetings always involved drinking beer, meeting before the meeting for dinner at a local restaurant, and frequent social interaction after the meetings. Thus, many friendships were made with members of the satellite group. Only when it occurred to me that some

of the members might be willing to grant me formal interviews did I tell the group of my study. Those who were willing to be formally interviewed contacted me, set times were made, and formal interviews were conducted outside the setting of the satellite group.

As Gold points out, this type of role can lead to the researcher "over-identifying" with the informants and thus become biased (1969, p. 35). Because of the nature of my topic, however, this was never a problem with which I had to deal. Had I been studying a particular group of persons - instead of a life process - such as a voluntary association of gays with a clear-cut set of boundaries, membership identification symbols, rituals of entry, etc., this could have posed a problem.

A third type of field role, the observer-as-participant role, was used in only 5 of the formal interviews I conducted for this study. In this type of role, as in the previously mentioned role, both the informant and researcher know that theirs is a field relationship. This role is used in one-time interviews where the participants in the research process come together specifically for the formal interview and do not interact socially thereafter. In this study, I used this in the interviews of informants' friends whom I didn't know before the interviews and with whom I didn't interact socially (to any significant extent) after the interviews were over.

In comparing the participant-as-observer with the observer-as-participant roles, I found the former was more natural for me. Also, I discovered that the former role lent itself to more useful data for this study. A good example of this occurred in the interview with Paris. Because both he and I were close friends before the study

as well as colleagues at work, we often talked about my research. At one time, Paris talked with me about how different it was to come out for young gay persons today in a large city compared to when he was a teenager. In one of our informal conversations, he gave me a good example of seeing gay teens in a local under-21 gay club interacting very freely with each other and seemingly having no guilt trips with which he had been plagued in his coming out process. In the formal (taped) interview, however, he failed to talk about this observation when I asked him if he thought it was easier or harder for gays to come out today compared to yesterday. I was able to turn off the recorder, ask him to talk about the phenomenon he had observed, and thus it was part of the formal interview. This type of research intervention was not possible to do in the observer-as-participant - or one-shot - research role.¹

Finally, the complete observer role is the fourth theoretical participant observation role. This role completely removes the researcher from social interaction with informants, and of the 4 possible field roles, this is the one which is almost never the dominant research device (Gold, 1969, pp. 36-37). In this study, the complete observer role was used in reading books and articles in sociology and gay studies

¹For an excellent comparison of the "participant-as-observer" versus the "observer-as-participant" roles, see Howard S. Becker and Blanch Greer's "Participant observation and interviewing: a comparison" in Filstead's QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY: FIRSTHAND INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SOCIAL WORLD. Chicago: Harkham, 1970, pp. 133-142. In this article, Becker and Greer's "participant observation" refers to Gold's "participant-as-observer" role, and their term "interviewing" refers to Gold's "observer-as-participant" role.

related to coming out and/or the gay experience, listening to gay music lyrics of such groups as Lavender Country or the Village People, listening to lectures by gay speakers, overhearing comments on coming out or about gays in general, reading news about gay issues in newspapers and magazines, and the like.

The Formal Interview.

The formal, or structured, interviews conducted with the 31 informants listed in Appendix A were those researcher-informant conversations which were conducted for the specific purpose of giving me data on coming out as a process and some of the consequences of coming out for the individual. Each took between 30 and 45 minutes on the average. All of these interviews were taped by me and then transcribed verbatim by a lesbian friend of mine who was hired for this purpose.

Because each informant had already had some degree of knowledge of my research topic before the interview, I simply reiterated the purpose of the research, i.e., that this was a study on coming out for my doctoral dissertation. Further, each informant was asked to answer a few demographic questions [see Appendix B] and then read and sign a permission form stating that the information which was given in their interview (except for their names) could be used by me in a variety of ways. [See Appendix C.] After each person gave me permission and answered the demographic form, I recorded this information on tape along with such information as time, place, and date of the interview.

In the beginning interviews, I relied almost totally on a set of questions designed to give me a broad spectrum of data on the coming out

process and how this process affected the individual's significant others in his/her life.¹ [See Appendix D for a list of beginning questions.]

As the data were compiled and analyzed, the list of questions was modified to cover only very specific topics which needed saturation.² Less and less I relied on rigidly set questionnaires, and I found that my set of questions became more specific. This often caused wonderment in the later informants as I didn't ask some of them things about coming out which they had expected. It was then necessary to explain the notion of saturation which they easily understood and accepted.

Through time and with increasing interviewing experience, I discovered that it was useful to tell the informant before the interview that s-he would have ample opportunity to address any issue of his/her choice, which wasn't covered in the interview and which s-he wanted to discuss, at the end of my questions. This was necessary as some informants tended to become rather tangential and circumstantial in their

¹For an excellent reference source on the interviewing process, see Raymond Gordon. INTERVIEWING: STRATEGY, TECHNIQUE, AND TACTICS. Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1969.

²Saturation in qualitative research
...means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated. He goes out of his way to look for groups that stretch diversity of data as far as possible, just to make certain that saturation is based on the widest possible range of data on the category. (Barney G. Glaser & Anselm L. Strauss. THE DISCOVERY OF GROUNDED THEORY: STRATEGIES FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH. Chicago: Aldine, 1967, p. 61.)
In my research, major theoretical topics are those stages of coming out listed in the chapter on "coming out as a process." Subtitles, such as "guilt," are referred to as indexicals of the topic "not wanting to be gay."

conversations. At times, it was necessary to point out that this was not a study of homosexuality, nor of sexual behavior, nor of political thought, etc., but rather a study of the coming out process of the gay individual which can be experienced by a gay celibate monk as well as a gay passing as straight in a heterosexual marriage, or by a gay socialist as well as a gay conservative Republican, or by a gay cowboy from Blazing Tumbleweed, Montana as well as a gay politico from San Francisco.

Each of the formal interviews was conducted in a 1:1 private setting except for one couples interview which I had with Carol and Evelyn. Although the couples interview was perhaps the most exciting in terms of the informants' bright affects, vivid examples, lots of joking, and general bouyancy generated by thought bouncing off each other's comments, it was also the most difficult to control. Comments were often coming so fast that the topics were often blurred. "I forgot what the question was. Could you repeat it?" was often heard. Also, although the individuals in this couple each had distinctive voices so my transcriptionist had no trouble when typing to keep their comments separate, I would imagine this could pose transcribing problems for groups of informants with similar voices. (Instructions asking informants to say their names before speaking don't work. In the excitement generated in the conversations, this is forgotten. When it is remembered, the giving of the name seems too stilted to be believable and destroys the free-flowing train of thought.)

In general, I found that as a rule, the greater the person's formal educational level, the more data were provided and more arttulatedly. I also found that many persons, when first approached about having an interview with me, expressed an "I'm not smart enough" attitude. "Well

I'd love to, but I'm not sure I can really help." or "Sure, but I just came out, so I don't know too much." were sometimes heard. By the time the interviews were done, however, these same persons said, "Boy, I didn't realize I did all that in coming out!" or "I guess coming out has a lot more to it than I thought!" or "That was sure stimulating! I sure learned a lot about myself in answering!" Many wanted to know if, based on the information given me, whether they fit the norm. Each was assured that they did indeed.

In order to get at certain data, I found that devising a test and then going backwards to see where the information given to the test questions came from was most beneficial. The two tests devised were an identification test [See Appendix E] and a ranking test [See Appendix F]. In the identification test, a list of famous persons, places, things or events known in the gay world (at the time of the interviews) was given verbally. The informant answered who or what each was if s-he could. I then asked the person where that information came from. A lover? A gay newspaper? A library book? On the radio or television? In doing this, I was able to learn about changing conceptions of being gay, how information is transmitted in coming out, what concerns on the social scene (such as an anti-gay initiative) might have on the person's involvements, and how selective sensitivity to "gay things" operates even in those persons who don't consider themselves part of the gay movement. This test also gave hints as to the person's ability to function by self in the gay world of Seattle and, therefore, the person's ability to pass this information along to gays just coming out. The question "Where would you go for VD treatment?" is an example of this. The second test,

ranking on the basis of perceived "sensitivity" between males and females and between gays and straights, was given as part of uncovering differences in the coming out of men and women. This will be discussed in more detail in the heart of this work.

At the end of many of the formal interview sessions, informants often gave me lists of books to read, movies to see, topics to research and books to write (!) in the future.

One final comment on the formal interview process done by a person using the "participant-as-observer" field role is in order. I often had the distinct feeling that the complete ritual surrounding the formal interview, i.e., the privacy, the signing of documents, the tape recorder, the pre-interview explanations, etc., took on a magical quality for those who were familiar with me in an other-than-sociologist role. Having a friend "turn into" a sociologist and then engaging in the ritual of a formal interview was very profound to many informants. In some instances, comments such as "This is really exciting!" were made before the interview actually got under way. The notion that something was very special, very out of the ordinary, and very important was happening occurred over and over. At the beginning of the interviews, for example, many persons sat up straighter, put out cigarettes, and did little things to make this seem special. In sum, I often felt like a shaman engaging in a mystical rite divorced from the real world of time and space; I think many of the informants "felt" the "magic" of the situation. The whole process was most invigorating for researcher and informant, and I learned from some informants that their interviews led to discussions with loved ones at home.

Analysis.

In qualitative research, the sociologist is being constantly bombarded with data which often seem shapeless and overwhelming. To create a meaningful and coherent picture of the social world out of these data is much like creating a mosaic; each piece must fit tightly or the result is modern art rather than the desired Rockwell. Ethnography requires the artist as much as the scientist in the sociologist.

Once I had gathered my first six interviews in Montana, and once each interview was transcribed (typed single-spaced), I carefully read through the data several times. It soon became clear to me that coming out is, indeed, a process. The question then raised was, if this is a process, what are its stages? Without much difficulty, the stages of coming out became clear to me and were seen in all of the interviews.

I then went through each interview and in the margins wrote down a heading of what was being discussed, e.g., "seeing society clearer" or "going to the big city" or "guilt." I then, on a separate piece of paper, listed all the categories under the informant's name so I could see what each person discussed.

I then cut out sections of the interviews and stapled them on 5" X 7" file cards and labeled them "seeing society clearer," "increased self-confidence," "sharing secrets," and the like. After it dawned on me that these were all indexicals of the category "perceived benefits of coming out," I put these cards in one stack and put an identification letter in the upper corner of each card. I did this same procedure with the other topics throughout the research until I felt each topic was

saturated.

I then put each card in each stack in the order they would appear in the actual writing. Anywhere from 5-10 interviews were analyzed in this fashion before I devised a different set of questions for the next batch of interviews for focus on different topics.

Throughout this research, the stages of coming out and the concepts were compared with other life processes and similar concepts and will be seen throughout this work.¹

Multi-source Use of Data.

Since at least the 1940's the thrust of American sociology has been in the direction of ever-increasing quantification with its concomitant use of computers, rapid sophistication of statistical tests, and the inevitable decrease of natural data sources of the social world. As a result of this compulsion to quantify social reality, questionnaires, scales and other forms of tests have been dominant in sociology. The result has been mountainous volumes of data verifying existing social theory. Even the disciplines of history and social/cultural anthropology have not been immune to this quantification movement.

The ethnographer as symbolic interactionist theorist, on the other hand, uses any datum in the world which could be used to generate, as opposed to verify, concepts and theories, be they substantive or formal.

¹See Glaser and Strauss' "The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis" in THE DISCOVERY OF GROUNDED THEORY, pp. 101-105.

Consequently, data such as jokes, poetry, novels, biographies and autobiographies, music lyrics and prayers have all been used in this study. To do otherwise would be to ignore valuable data sources which bear on the coming out process. Further, by ignoring non-sociologists' works, one is guilty of an unwarranted act of arrogance toward persons who, very often, reflect the concerns and reality of the world in poetry and prose much richer than that of the typical sociologist-writer. This multi-source use of data tradition, going back to the Chicago school of sociology uses such data sources to get glimpses into the society and culture of groups under study. In *THE HOBO* by Nels Anderson (1923), for example, we find poetry reflecting the power of the "wanderlust," the deeply-felt personal rejection of the hobo by the dominant society, the role played by the missions in the life of the 'bos, the dreams of a better life, and the notions of a hereafter life where "beef stews grow on bushes and you sleep out every night " (p. 212). A more contemporary symbolic interactionist sociologist who is a master of non-traditional sources of data handling is Erving Goffman, who begins his classic book *STIGMA: NOTES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SPOILED IDENTITY* (1963) with this letter:

Dear Miss Lonelyhearts -

I am sixteen years old now and I dont know what to do and would appreciate it if you could tell me what to do. When I was a little girl it was not so bad because I got used to the kids on the block makeing fun of me, but now I would like to have boy friends like the other girls and go out on Saturday nights, but no boy will take me because I was born without a nose - although I am a good dancer and have a nice shape and my father buys me pretty clothes.

I sit and look at myself all day and cry. I have a big hole in the middle of my face that scares people even myself so I cant blame the boys for not wanting to take me out. My mother loves me, but she crys terrible when she looks at me.

What did I do to deserve such a terrible bad fate? Even if I did do some bad things I didn't do any before I was a year old and I was born this way. I asked Papa and he says he doesnt know, but that maybe I did something in the other world before I was born or that maybe I was being punished for his sins. I dont believe that because he is a very nice man. Ought I commit suicide?

Sincerely yours,
Desperate¹

Field Notes.

As data from many sources begin to pour in, and as the researcher is faced with analysis and comparing many aspects of the social world under study, the use of field notes or a log becomes quite helpful. In "Gay Freedom," I kept a log which included such things as questions to ask my next set of informants, topics I found discussed in novels or poetry which I could later return to in the writing of this work, notes on other social processes which are similar to coming out, records of persons I contacted to use their cartoons or writings in this work, topics for future studies, and the like. Although this log was often ignored at times due to fatigue, "lack of time," and other reasons, I've come to the conclusion that such a device is crucial to ethnographic pursuits.²

¹For a further discussion of the appropriate uses of such data, see Glaser and Strauss' THE DISCOVERY OF GROUNDED THEORY, pp. 161-163.

²For a clear, concise and most helpful discussion on the organizing of field notes, see Leonard Schatzman & Anselm L. Strauss. FIELD RESEARCH: STRATEGIES FOR A NATURAL SOCIOLOGY. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: 1973, Chapter 6.

The Question of Validity and Reliability.

In all scientific research, one is faced with the twin questions of "Is this work reliable?" and "Is this work valid?"

In present-day sociology, because of its reliance on operationalizing concepts to be able to quantify the empirical world, the emphasis has been on "reliability" as opposed to a healthy concern for "validity." Reliability can be defined as the ability to get similar or same results by different researchers using the same research tool. Validity, on the other hand, answers the question, "Are we, in fact, studying and finding that which our research tools are purporting to study?" Irwing Deutscher talks about sociology's "obsession with reliability" to the detriment of concern about validity.

The problem of validity has tended to receive short shrift in the social sciences. At least, this appears to be true when we compare it with the attention devoted to the problem of reliability. Following the customary distinction, the concept of validity addresses itself to the truth of an assertion that is made about something in the empirical world. The concept of reliability, on the other hand, concentrates on the degree of consistency in the tests, documents, observers, informants. Although it is possible to create an abstract mathematical relationship between validity and reliability, the relationship between the two concepts is asymmetric, i.e., measurement can be consistently in error as well as consistently correct and therefore a high degree of reliability can be achieved anywhere along the continuum between absolute invalidity and absolute validity. (1970, p. 202)

In wrestling with the reliability of my procedures in "Gay Freedom," I have matter-of-factly determined that any other sociologist or anthropologist would come up with the same stages of coming out which I have uncovered. Needless to say, this assumes that the other researcher(s) would engage in theoretical sampling of an American population at this

point in history.¹

In dealing with the validity of this study, I set up a gay Advisory Committee of 4 gay persons to serve as "reality testers" for my findings. As the basic definition of ethnography is a descriptive portrayal of the social world under study, one would expect the experts of the social world under study, in this case gays and lesbians who've "done or are doing coming out," to be able to tell me if my work is an accurate portrayal of the coming out reality. This is my basic test for validity. In addition, this Advisory Committee served to help me clarify concepts, give me additional examples of real life situations, and ask questions leading to more organization in developing links between concepts.²

Finally, a word about "glossing." As the ethnographer becomes increasingly familiar with the material under study, the greater becomes the chance that s-he will begin to gloss in the presentation of the material in writing. Glossing may be defined as a superficial presentation of words done on the assumption that "everybody would know what these words mean." This phenomenon is also common among professors

¹In addition to Deutscher's discussion of reliability and validity in qualitative research, see also the classic article by Howard S. Becker, "Problems of inference and proof in participant observation," in George J. McCall and J.L. Simmon' (Eds.) ISSUES IN PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION: A TEXT AND READER. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969, pp. 245-257.

²A sterling example of the honing process which groups of persons under study can contribute to data clarification can be seen in YOU OWE YOURSELF A DRUNK: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF URBAN NOMADS by James Spradley. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970.) In this work, Spradley used tramps to differentiate the various categories of tramps to avoid lumping similar categories under one category. Thus, each of his categories are mutually exclusive of one another.

who find themselves teaching the same course quarter after quarter and fail to adequately define terms. In my study, to avoid glossing and to ensure that my presentation could be understood by both non-gay and non-sociologist readers, I had the amazingly good fortune to be able to set up a Gloss-Clarity Committee of 3 straight professional writers.¹ Their job was to read my writing for glossing errors and clarity.

The Quest for Objectivity.

In his discussion of sociological "objectivity" for beginning sociology college students, James McKee defined objectivity as

...social thought sufficiently disciplined to reduce the possible distortions in observation and analysis produced by one's more personal attitudes, emotions, values, and dislikes. In being objective, one seeks to be relatively unbiased in looking at social facts; one tries not to confuse social facts with one's feelings about them. (1969, pp. 44-45)

In ethnographic research, more than in any other form of sociological inquiry, the quest for objectivity is ongoing always and always most challenging. Gold warns about "going native" and losing the ethnographer's goal of being a "stranger" in the world under study (1969, pp. 30-39), Becker warns about "unconventional sentimentality" in which the researcher becomes the "advocate for the underdog" (1964, pp. 1-6), and Miller warns us of "over-rapport" (1969, pp. 87-89). Because the

¹The Gloss-Clarity Committee includes: John Cain, a widely-published writer of fiction, poetry and detective novels; Ron Post, a budding young film-script writer and author of children's books and poetry; and Bruce Taylor, poet and one of the most prolific and famous fantasy and science fiction writers in the Pacific Northwest. Because of the outside employment of these men, and because there was the possibility of identifying one or more of my informants, each was asked to sign a confidentiality statement. (See Appendix H.)

steps must be taken to maximize objectivity.

In "Gay Freedom," the steps taken to insure objectivity are four: (1) personal integrity and astuteness on my part as a scientist; (2) the examination of this work by non-gays (the Gloss-Clarity Committee) to insure terminology was adequately explained and that glossing was eliminated; (3) scrutinizing by my doctoral dissertation committee; and, (4) testing for validity of the work by gays on my Advisory Committee.

A further help in objectivity in this study has been that it is a study of a social life process rather than a community (tribe, gang, prison, island, etc.) study. Thus, coming out and its stages are intrinsically not as likely to evoke biased reporting as, say, an ethnography of a gay politico-religious commune.

However, while the above listed strategies for objectivity have been effective in my opinion, it is necessary to point out here another pitfall which can destroy objective narration in gay studies. Unlike any other field of sociology with which I am familiar, the field of gay studies contains many writings which are extremely homophobic and thus very non-sociological and non-scientific. However, because of the writers' academic credentials, such writings get published as "sociology." Thus, the unsuspecting novice ethnographer's journey into a "review of the literature" could lead to disaster if s-he was not "wise" as Goffman would say. In a very real sense, then, the sociological ethnographer in gay studies is "reinventing the wheel." And while examples abound, I leave the reader with just one example - a few sentences - of just one sociologist, Kingsley Davis, who abandons the Canons of Science to

engage in a poisoning-of-the-wells diatribe.

...No one knows how many murders occur in homosexual quarrels, but the circumstances in newspaper accounts suggest that they are fairly frequent.

...Homosexual behavior, if institutionalized and given the same normative status as heterosexual behavior, would involve obligations and conformity to stipulated patterns...Under such a regime, the nature and role of homosexual intercourse in personal life would be fundamentally altered. It would no longer constitute an avenue of neurotic escape, an expression of social hostility, a means of protest. Under such circumstances would many choose the "homosexual way of life" as against the normal heterosexual way? [Underlining mine]

(1971, pp. 359-360)

Davis' writing is not merely false, distorting, unenlightened and incendiary, but rather it is rabidly homophobic. One clear advantage of the gay ethnographer over the straight ethnographer who is indeed a total "stranger" to the gay world, then, is his or her ability to spot homophobic, non-scientific diatribes quickly. S-he can then dismiss such writings from serious consideration in the research process, and s-he can "call a spade a spade" and destroy the credibility of homophobic writings. The value of this cannot be overemphasized.

'Nuff said.

Ethical Considerations.

As scientific inquiry expands to ever-increasing depths and aspects of human life, the protection of human life - or ethics - becomes ever more crucial. In the physical and health sciences, many questions are being raised about the ethical or moral aspects of research procedures (e.g., withholding venereal disease treatment from Southern blacks

without their knowledge, giving LSD to American soldiers without their consent, and putting bacteria in New York subway systems without public approval) and also the application of research's knowledge to human populations (e.g., the administration of electroconvulsive therapy - ECT - to mental patients, creating "superior-intelligence" genetic sperm banks, or using sterilization techniques to uncomprehending mental retards). In sociology, and especially in ethnographic and other field research studies, ethical concerns take an ever-increasing importance. The ethnographer becomes a living repository of the most intimate details of informants' lives. The hidden depths of the soul - one's dreams, hopes, fears, behaviors (legal and otherwise), likes and dislikes, political views, sexual orientation, etc. - are often poured out to the ethnographer. The ethnographer, then, as the possessor of what Jon Driessen calls "guilty knowledge," has great power over the informant. Such power over human beings can never be taken lightly. Likewise, as a gay studies specialist, one must be concerned about the current extent of homophobia in American society and the effect that could have on the lives of the informants if their identities became known. (One of the most glaring failures to give adequate protection to gay informants occurred with the publication of THE BOYS OF BOISE in 1966; several informants committed suicide as a result.)

In order to achieve a high standard of sociological ethics, several measures were taken in this study. First, the use of "disguised

observation" was ruled out from the beginning.¹ Second, the "Policy statement for the use of human subjects" of the University of Montana [See Appendix G] was adhered to completely. Third, all informants who gave formal interviews were asked to sign a document [see Appendix C] indicating their consent to be part of this research project and that their names wouldn't be used. Each informant has been given a fictitious name, and the names of small towns of birth, small schools attended, and other possible sources of identification were changed to avoid recognition while not intrinsically changing the basic story. Interestingly enough, many of the informants asked that I use their real names; "I'm proud to be gay" and "I'm proud to be part of your research" was often given as the reason. One individual, Mark, even went so far as to cross out the words "with the exception of my name" on the consent form and initial his crossing-out.

And finally, and probably most importantly, ethical standards have

¹For more comprehensive and thought-provoking discussions concerning both "disguised observation" as well as general ethical questions in field research, see in Filstead's QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY the following articles: J.A. Barnes' "Some ethical problems in modern fieldwork" (pp. 235-251); Kai T. Erickson's "A comment on disguised observation in sociology" (pp. 252-260); Joseph H. Fichter and William L. Kolb's "Ethical limitations on sociological reporting" (pp. 261-270); Fred Davis' "Comment on 'Initial interaction of newcomers in Alcoholics Anonymous'" (pp. 271-274); and Julian A. Roth's "Comments on 'Secret Observation'" (pp. 278-280). In McCall & Simon's ISSUES IN PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION (1969) see: Howard S. Becker's "Problems in the publication of field studies" (pp. 260-275) and Lee Rainwater & David J. Pittman's "Ethical problems in studying a politically sensitive and deviant community" (pp. 276-288).

been met by objectivity. What effect Kingsley Davis' words has had on the lives of gay college students reading his article, or the use of his work by homophobes in power positions, can only be conjectured. Thus, adequate and objective description of coming out and the persons who have come out, is the basic, most necessary, criterion of ethics in this study.

Summary.

In order to uncover the life process of coming out for the gay individual, field research procedures were undertaken. Participant observation techniques, which includes the use of non-traditional forms of sociological data as cartoons, music, novels, poetry and the like, as well as traditional formal and informal interviews and observations, serve to insure that an adequate portrayal of the coming out process is met. As a gay sociological ethnographer, I devised several strategies designed to both protect human informants and to capture objectivity in "Gay Freedom." Through the use of naturalistic sociological procedures mandated by a symbolic interactionist theoretical framework, an important contribution has been made not only to the substantive theory of the sociological specialty of gay studies, but also, this work will serve as another example of "doing ethnography" for other researchers interested in this fascinating methodology.

CHAPTER THREE - COMING OUT AND ITS DIMENSIONS

Ned and you and the married couple wind up at a movie that evening; as you're all coming out of the theater you see two men together. They're smiling at each other. One of them touches the other's shoulder lightly. They get into their car. It's dark, only you are looking at them, and you alone see them kiss for just a second.

They drive off in one direction and your group in the other. For a long time you look in your rear-view mirror, trying to keep their car in sight. You wish you were with them.

And then you realize you are. They're part of your world, and you're part of theirs. You're not alone anymore.

(Silverstein & White, 1977, p. 63)

INTRODUCTION.

Coming out is the essence of the gay experience. It is a phenomenon shared by all gay Americans, whether frozen in a stage of identification without self-acceptance or in a stage of complete acceptance of being gay. Because of this, when one gay person meets another, s-he knows a good deal about the other. S-he, for example, knows of the struggle for identifying self as gay, the changing conceptions of what gay people are like which might have occurred, dealing with guilt or sadness, and perhaps the exhilarating feeling which comes with accepting gayness as a positive force in one's life. S-he knows this person has done deep soul-searching to decide whether to tell friends, family and others. S-he knows what it feels like to have vicious lies told about "faggots" and "dykes." This particular type of comradeship-producing process is unique to the gay individual.

It is important to realize that there is no similar counterpart [the coming out process] for the heterosexual individual. A straight person does have to decide, in light of accepted standards, when to

engage in sexual activity and the extent to which s-he will reveal this activity. However, the straight [heterosexually-oriented] person does not have to travel the difficult path of questioning and accepting the elemental fact of his/her heterosexuality. The homosexual, on the other hand, has to deal with this often presupposed issue of sexual orientation and identification long before s-he even becomes concerned about the extent to which s-he will exercise his/her homosexual nature. (Salvatorians, 1974, p. 7)

Despite the fact that coming out is so fundamental to an understanding of the gay experience, there has yet to be a scholarly book researching this process. At most, one learns about coming out from good gay autobiographies¹ and biographies,² and at the least, one is able to find an isolated article written on the subject or part of a chapter. "Gay Freedom" is designed to be one of the first such scholarly works.

¹Some of the more popular gay autobiographies include: Malcolm Boyd. TAKE OFF THE MASKS. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1978; Howard Brown. FAMILIAR FACES HIDDEN LIVES: THE STORY OF HOMOSEXUAL MEN IN AMERICA TODAY. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976; Lige Clarke & Jack Nichols. I HAVE MORE FUN WITH YOU THAN ANYBODY. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972; Michael Denny. LOVERS: THE STORY OF TWO MEN. New York: Avon Books, 1979; Christopher Isherwood. CHRISTOPHER AND HIS KIND: 1929-1939. New York: Farrar-Strauss-Giroux, 1976; Arnie Kantrowitz. UNDER THE RAINBOW: GROWING UP GAY. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1977; David Kopay and Perry Deane Young. THE DAVID KOPAY STORY. New York: Arbor House, 1977; Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon. LESBIAN WOMAN. New York: A Bantam Book, 1972; Troy Perry with Charles L. Lucas. THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD AND HE KNOWS I'M GAY. New York: A Bantam Book, 1972; John Reid. THE BEST LITTLE BOY IN THE WORLD. New York: Ballantine, 1973, 1976; Tennessee Williams. MEMOIRS. New York: Bantam Books, 1972, 1975.

²Biographical works include: Nancy & Casey Adair (Eds.). WORD IS OUT: THE STORY OF SOME OF OUR LIVES (interviews). San Francisco & New York: New Glide Publications/A Delta Special, 1978; Alan Ebert. THE HOMOSEXUALS. New York: Macmillan, 1976, 1977; Noel I. Garde. JONATHAN TO GIDE. New York: Nosbooks, 1969; Winston Leyland. GAY SUNSHINE INTERVIEWS (Vols. 1 & 2). San Francisco: Sunshine Press, 1978 & 1979; Samuel M. Stewart (Ed.). DEAR SAMMY: LETTERS FROM GERTRUDE STEIN AND ALICE B. TOKLAS. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977; A.L. Rowe. HOMOSEXUALS IN HISTORY: A STUDY OF AMBIVALENCE IN SOCIETY, LITERATURE AND THE ARTS. New York: Macmillan, 1977; and Kay Tobin & Randy Wicker. THE GAY CRUSADERS. New York: Paperback Library, 1972.

In this chapter, coming out and its stages shall be defined, the qualitative nature of coming out shall be briefly examined, and finally, the quantitative dimensions of the coming out process will be shown in notes on the relationship of coming out to society.

But before any of this can happen, a few preliminary definitions of concepts used in this work must be given so that the reader and writer are using the concepts to mean the same things; these concepts will be used throughout this work. New concepts will be explained as they appear.

I. PRELIMINARY CONCEPT DEFINITIONS.

A. Homosexuality.

Homosexuality refers to an unchosen, lifelong, and irreversible predominant physical (sexual) and psychological attraction to members of one's own sex as opposed to the opposite sex. It may or may not lead to same-sex sexual behavior. This concept is not to be confused with "situational homosexuality" which is a term describing same-sex sexual behavior (rather than an orientation) which occurs among persons of the same sex in situations where there is a lack of opposite-sex partners. In prisons, for example, situational homosexuality may occur between heterosexuals (straights) because there are no members of the opposite sex available. When released from prison, such a person returns to the opposite sex for sexual gratification.

"Unchosen" is used here to indicate that one's sexual orientation or "affectional preference" as it is called in some legal circles -- whether homosexual or heterosexual, is determined in the very early years of human life. As we will see in the next chapter, all my informants,

once they reached the stage of identifying self as gay, said that "in retrospect, looking back, I've always been gay." This has been confirmed by informal interviews also.

"Irreversible," the other adjective which needs explaining, means that one's sexual orientation, whether gay or straight, is "for keeps." All efforts to "change" sexual orientation to date have been unsuccessful...(or "successful" from the gay liberationist point of view.) When one hears of a "former gay," this usually refers to a gay person who engages in other-sex (as opposed to same-sex) sexual behavior in opposition to his or her sexual orientation or gives up sex completely.

Finally, the word "homosexuality" comes from the Greek words "same" "sex." It does not come from the Latin "man" "sex." Thus, writers who confuse "homosexual" with gay men are in error; this term also includes women.

But, this is not a study on homosexuality. Nor is it a study on sexual behavior per se. Rather, it is a study of the coming out process of gays - gay men and lesbians - whether their sexual behavior is homosexual, heterosexual, autosexual, celibate, or whatever.

If one keeps in mind that homosexuality and heterosexuality refer to unchosen orientations rather than specific types of sexual behaviors, the rest of this study will be easy to follow. Thus, Alfred Kinsey in his classic studies on sexual behaviors did NOT study homosexuality NOR heterosexuality NOR the incidence of such; rather, he studied incidences of same-sex and other-sex sexual behaviors. It is from translating sexual behavior incidences to orientations that we get our most knowledgeable estimate of the American gay population of 20-21,000,000.

B. Heterosexuality.

Heterosexuality refers to an unchosen, lifelong, and irreversible predominant physical (sexual) and psychological attraction to members of the opposite sex as opposed to the same sex. This concept shouldn't be confused with "situational heterosexuality" in which a person with a gay orientation has sex with the opposite sex as a form of passing as straight.

C. Bisexuality.

Bisexuality is an equal attraction (sexual and psychological) to both sexes. True bisexuality is extremely rare (Mungo, 1980, p. 53). Despite its rarity, even knowledgeable gay writers and behavioral scientists in the field of sexuality get confused when writing about bisexuality and state its incidence as much larger than it is. Many men and women, either as a form of passing as straight or before identifying themselves as gay, engage in other-sex sexual behavior. Sexual behavior does not create sexual orientation (a state of being) nor does sexual behavior necessarily indicate a particular sexual orientation. In current American society, as well as in most societies which have strict taboos against the sexual expression of homosexuality, many, if not most, gays engage in other-sex sexual behavior usually in the context of marriage.

D. Straight.

Straight will refer to persons having heterosexual orientation. Because so many gays pass as straight, many persons perceived as straights are actually gay. More about that in Chapter Five.

Straight is also used as an adjective to describe activities done by

straights or to describe non-gay places. In mentioning "the straight role" in one interview, for example, my informant Fabian explained what he meant:

Oh, you know, the straight role is when someone is completely into a macho trip. Chasing after women, being the playboy. It's not having any gay sensitivity. (Fabian)

E. Homosexual vs. Gay.

Both "homosexual" and "gay" are used as adjectives and nouns and often used interchangeably by persons in everyday life. In this study, I use the term "gay" because it's the term preferred by my informants. It is in vogue and likely is here to stay. Gay : black :: homosexual : Negro. Gay and black are 1980; homosexual and Negro are 1960.

The term "gay" also implies a sense of community and one of safety. When I asked Lonny, one of my informants, if he would feel comfortable telling others he was gay, he replied:

Well, if the person I was telling used the word "homosexual," I would be afraid. But, if they used the word "gay," it would be okay. (Lonny)

Further, "gay"¹ is a gay-chosen word; "homosexual" is a straight-chosen word pushed onto gays. Feelings about labels run deep as can be seen in the following:

Kus: How about the term "gay" versus "homosexual?"

Xavier: I feel much more comfortable with the word gay than I do

¹The origin of "gay" to refer to "homosexual" is unknown. Webster's defines "gay" as follows:

1. joyous and lively; merry; happy; light-hearted
2. bright; brilliant: as gay colors
3. given to social life and pleasures: as a gay life
4. wanton, licentious: as a gay dog (1960, p. 600)

with homosexual. I'm not sure why. But I do know that homophobic people like Anita Bryant always use the term homosexual and never gay. I like gay better. It's shorter and faster to say than homosexual. And it's probably just the content of the word 'homosexual' that turns people off, because when you break it down, you've got the sex in there. And that's not 100% what we're all about. I think the word sex just screams at you in homosexual and gay it doesn't.
(Xavier)

In a similar vein, Don Clark says,

One way that gay people are disadvantaged is that long ago people in the Judeo-Christian world began to think of us as homosexuals - that is HOMOsexuals or homoSEXUALS, take your pick. Either way, what set us apart from the rest of the population was sexual behavior. The line was drawn right then and there. Nice people did not cross that sexual line (and if they did, they stopped being nice people)...we have also been taught to view ourselves as people whose whole lives revolve around our "strange" sexual appetite. Obediently we tend to think of ourselves as sex-obsessed creatures whose obsession is not even of the approved variety.
(Clark, 1979, pp. 80-81)

Further, gay is a state of being, not merely a reference to sex:

A few weeks ago a gay brother and I interviewed a lawyer who is a kind of Charles Garry for the gay community in San Francisco. I asked him if he is gay. He said, "If you're trying to get me to say I'm queer, I won't do it. What I do in bed is nobody's business."

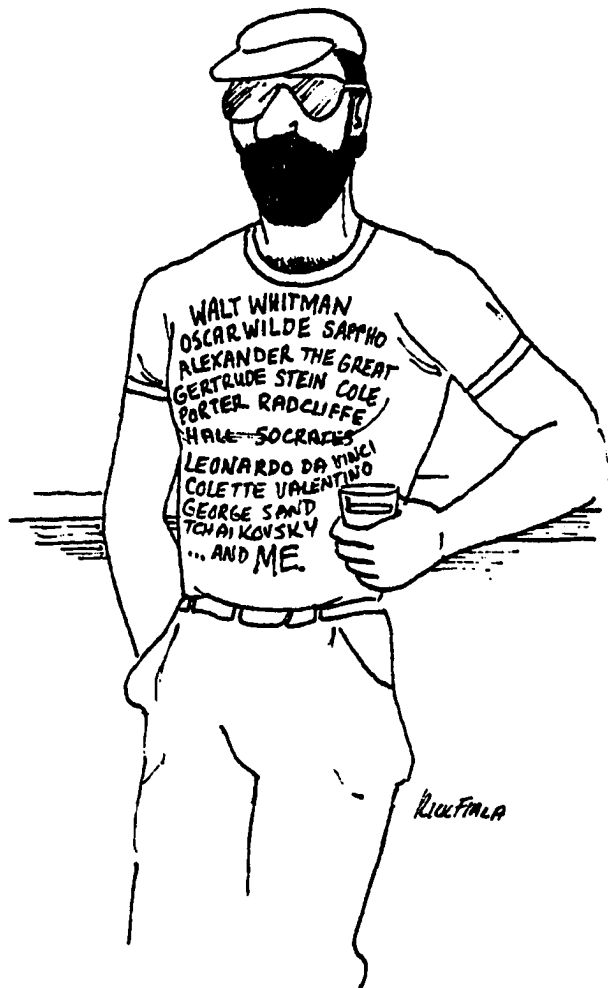
I wanted to scream, "Honey, I don't care what you do in bed, I just asked if you are gay."

A few weeks later I was rapping with some women who are heavy into Women's Liberation. "You zero in on sex; you always zero in on sex," they said. I've been told the same thing by liberal homosexuals and straights alike: "What you do in bed is your own business, do your thing." They are saying that gay means SEX, nothing but sex.

Well, I'm tired to the bone of being told what I am. I am gay. Yes, yes, my cock, my mouth and my asshole are gay. So are my fingernails, my big toe, my nose and my brain. I am not gay because of where I put my cock or who I sleep with. I am gay because everything about me is gay...
(Alinder, 1973, p. 139)

Finally, "gay" has many theoretical and philosophical implications in the gay experience and in the coming out process as will be seen throughout this work.

A homosexual person is gay when he (include she) regards himself as happily gifted with whatever capacity he has to see people as romantically beautiful. It is to be free of shame, guilt, regret over



the fact that one is homosexual, that the searchlight of one's childhood vision of human beings shined more brilliantly on members of one's own sex than on those of the other. That, for whatever reasons, it illuminated those and gave them fascination - and burst them into sexual brilliance when the body learned to crave what it had been pursuing. To be gay is to view one's sexuality as the healthy heterosexual views his.

To be gay is to be free of the need for ongoing self-inquisition, the sort that preoccupies those who feel abandoned and are searching for a reason: "How did I become homosexual?" "Is this a disease?" "Who's to blame?" "Should I go for therapy?" "Was Julius Caesar homosexual?"

Being gay means having freed oneself of misgivings over being homosexual. At its best it means not limiting oneself to a stereotype - a model of some previous homosexual - for one's personality, at work, at parties, with a lover. It means remaining free to invent, to imbue life with fantasy. It means being able to investigate one's preferences and desires in sexual roles where one chooses, without having to construct a personality elsewhere consistent with this, to justify it, to account for it. In essence, it means being convinced that any erotic orientation and preference may be housed in any human being. (Weinberg, 1972, pp. 70-71)

F. Lesbian.

While the term "gay" can be used for both men and women, "lesbian" refers only to gay women. One frequently sees "lesbians and gay men" in titles of books and community groups. The word lesbian comes from Lesbos, the Greek island where lived the famous lyric poetess Sappho of ancient Greece who wrote extensively about women loving women verse (Wysor, 1974, p. 190).¹

¹ Throughout this work, the reader will note that literature written by or about gay men is quoted more frequently than literature by or about lesbians. This is not an oversight, nor does it have any particular theoretical base. Rather, it is a matter of pragmatics. As the amount of gay literature increased, and the amount of money to spend decreased, a decision was made to buy only those women's studies and lesbian books I thought would be classics. It is most difficult to keep purchasing the large numbers of gay books coming out today. An example of such a "classic" is Ginny Vida (Ed.). OUR RIGHT TO LOVE: A LESBIAN RESOURCE READER. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978...a "must" book for lesbians.

G. Lover.

Except for a conversation which happened a couple of years ago, it never would have occurred to me to define "lover" in this work. One night a fellow nurse and I were on duty. I had just completed my monthly column for the SEATTLE GAY NEWS called "Gays in Action" which was designed to give biographical sketches of successful, fulfilled lesbians and gay men to serve as positive role models in the gay community. I showed my latest column to my colleague. Her response was, "Bob, I can't believe you wrote this! It's a terrible thing. I can't ever go along with this!" "What on earth?!" I was thinking. As it turned out, I had mentioned that person X lived with her lover. My colleague confused the gay term "lover" with a straight term meaning "sex partner." After I explained that a lover was more like a straight spouse, i.e., lovers were coupled gays, she replied, "Oh, I didn't realize that! The article's great!"

As it happened, we spent almost every evening together that fall. Although my new responsibilities at work kept me occupied, we generally talked on the phone once a day, or even twice, and I never stayed at the office past six or seven or on weekends the way I had before coming out.

After a few weeks we came to the realization that we were not just "doing a thing." We were "lovers." Two gay men who spend their time together and who are supposed to feel guilty if they have sex with someone else are lovers. (Reid, 1973, p. 154)

H. Homophobia.

Homophobia¹ refers to an attitude of fear and/or hatred of gays,

¹For a thorough discussion of the concept of homophobia, see George Weinberg. SOCIETY AND THE HEALTHY HOMOSEXUAL. Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1973, pp. 1-20. For examples of homophobic action - or discrimination - see every edition of THE ADVOCATE.

homosexual sex behavior, or homosexuality. As an attitude, it need not be expressed in behavior or action. Homophobia can be seen in gays who haven't reached the stage of acceptance, but usually it refers to attitudes of straights.

One can see homophobic behavior expressed by a person free from homophobia (the attitude.) An example of this might be a straight person who is very accepting of gays yet laughs at her boss' "dyke" jokes to keep her job or get a raise.

II. TOWARD A DEFINITION OF COMING OUT.

A. The closet.

If one is "coming out," there must be someplace from where the individual is coming. In gay terminology, the "someplace" does not refer to a geographical location, although as we'll see later, coming out often does have a geographical dimension to it. Rather, closet refers to a state of mind, a condition of hiding, or "passing" in Goffman's terms (Goffman, 1963, pp. 73-91).

A closet is a small place. A place which allows for little freedom of movement. It is confining. A closet is a dark place. Darkness within can only be banished by flinging open the door to allow the sunshine in. "The closet," as one gay sign reads, "is a lonely place to die."

When one speaks of "being in the closet," s-he is referring to hiding the fact of one's gay identity from others. An example of "closet gays" is provided by Monty to illustrate the point.

To me the closet homosexual is a person who might admit every once in a while, especially when they're drunk, that they might like to have sex with men, and look and maybe find sex with men, and the

next morning saying, "God, was I drunk!" You know, "Oh, I'm so ashamed; I don't know how I did it. I just can't stand queers." They're completely straight in their own eyes, even though they're lying to themselves. It's a hiding; that's where the term closet comes from - hiding in the closet, not admitting to anyone else and to yourself that you are gay or that it's all right. (Monty)

As will be seen later, most gays should not be seen as being either in the closet or out of the closet. There are many shades of gray between the completely-out gay and the gay who, while identifying self as gay and not accepting this as good, passes as straight.

B. Process.

According to Webster's dictionary, a process is

2. course, as of time;
3. a continuing development involving many changes: as the process of digestion;
4. a particular method of doing something, generally involving a number of steps. (1960, p. 1101)

Taken one by one, each of these definitions can be used to formulate a working definition of the process of coming out. And while this ethnography is devoted completely to that process, and therefore will discuss these aspects in detail, for now let's look briefly at how each of these definitions can be used toward formulating a coming out definition.

1. "course, as of time".

Coming out has a natural history for each person undergoing this process. For many older gay persons, especially, coming out has been a slow process, a tedious process. For some persons, though, coming out is very rapid; this is seen increasingly among young American Coastal urban gays.

The lengths between stages is also different for each gay person. Later we'll see how informant Terry zipped through his coming out process, going from identification to acceptance in a week or so, while Rev. Troy took much longer to get to acceptance.

2. "a continuing development involving many changes: as the process of digestion."

For the individual, coming out indicates a radical identity transformation and, if s-he gets to the stage of acceptance, a radical self-esteem transformation.

In "Finding supportive therapy," an article for lesbians by Dr. Dorothy Riddle, we see

Coming out to yourself means a total redefinition of self. It means getting rid of socialized prejudices that women are less talented or interesting than men, and feeling good about being a woman. It means stepping outside the system of gaining respect and prestige by being willing to be related to on your own merits. Affirming your lesbian identity also involves giving up social support for your relationships - giving up fantasies about being taken care of by a male, or planning your life around caring for a male.

Coming out means questioning societal norms and values and coming to terms with yourself separate from those expectations. For lesbians, in particular, this society is an alien place. We are bombarded with the heterosexual life-style in books, newspapers, television shows, movies, plays, etc. All of us need places where we can be accepted and affirmed as ourselves, totally ourselves, rather than being tolerated or feared or treated as invisible.

(1978, p. 89)

3. "a particular method of doing something, generally involving a number of steps."

Coming out, as will be seen throughout this work, consists of a series of steps or stages. One of the best informal descriptions of the stages of coming out I've seen is that given by my informant Montv:

I think the whole process is first, you stumble across it.

might hear about gays two or three times and not even think a thing about it. And then there's the time you think, I wonder if I might be. And you stop at that. But as time goes on, you start thinking about it more and more, and then comes the point where you say, "Yes, I am gay!" And then there's a lot more hassles involved with accepting it, you know, and saying, "Well, I don't feel bad because I am." And then, I think, that's what coming out is. From the very first stumbling across "gay" or "homosexual" to admitting to yourself that you are and being satisfied with that. (Monty)

C. Sexual definitions.

In pre-Stonewall days, coming out meant having one's first same-sex sexual experience as an adult.

Back in 1947, coming out meant letting a few other homosexuals know that you were one, too. You had come out of the closet and into, if not the world, at least the shadowy subworld of the gay bars. Nowadays, "coming out" means giving up any effort to conceal your homosexuality. (Brown, 1976, p. 49)

Sexual definitions fall very short of describing the coming out process. They ignore especially gay celibates, say nothing about the internal psychological changes one undergoes, and ignore gays who only engage in heterosexual sexual activity as part of passing as straights.

D. Kissing definitions.

One phenomenon found especially among some gay men is the notion that showing affection, especially via kissing, is the ultimate sign of one's gayness. "If I don't kiss, I'm not gay." This is the type of attitude found in Albert J. Reiss, Jr.'s "The social integration of queers and peers " (1964, pp. 181-210). In that study, Reiss found hustlers performing same-sex sexual acts with clients for money while vehemently denying a gay or "queer" identity. No signs of affection were permissible; to show such signs would indicate to the hustler that he was indeed gay.

Following are two slices of data. One sees kissing as a coming out process definition, the other doesn't.

Kus: Do you see coming out as having stages?

Xavier: Boy, for myself, I guess there were only 2 stages, if we're counting. When I first came out I was, I don't know what the terms are, shall we just say sucking and fucking. Forgive me. But I can remember one time - now this was all in a small town - that a man I was having sex with wanted to kiss me, and this turned me off. I'm not proud of this, but that's the way it was. I just couldn't imagine kissing ever happening while I was willing to do everything else sexually. So, for me, coming out probably had 2 stages. Now in the same vein, there was never dancing available in the small town where I was. So, that never came into play as far as this plateau of coming out. But kissing did, because I just couldn't see doing it at all. So, I went to Spokane. I hadn't danced nor kissed before then, but I was totally uninhibited sexually as a gay person.

Kus: Did you get over your feelings about man-to-man kissing?

Xav.: Oh, well, the first time I was kissed was in Spokane. It was the greatest thing ever! It was just that at that teenage time in my life, kissing wasn't something we did. Stupid, but I had no aversion to anything else; sex was all very natural for me, but kissing wasn't.

And Paris:

Kus: Paris, in a couple of my interviews, men have said that they were more comfortable having sex than they were kissing. Did you find this in your experience?

Paris: No, just the opposite. It's very hard for me to get into casual sex without really either knowing or feeling something more than just, you know, lustful longing.

Kus: I'm referring more to the very first time.

Paris: The exact first time, hmmm. Oh, yeah, even then. I can remember it was much easier to kiss than have sex for me. In fact, the very first night I spent with another man, there was very little sexual activity. Mostly we just kissed and held each other and caressed each other. Very wonderful. The sex came later.

Like sexual definitions, the kissing definition falls short of the mark.

E. Community-based definitions.

Definitions which have coming out as entering a "gay community" are highly urbocentric. Gay theorists and writers often live on the coasts of America and take their samples from places such as San Francisco and New York where large gay communities exist. This conveniently leaves out the rural gays as well as urban gays who chose not to identify with "the gay community." Two examples of this type of definition are:

Very often, the debut, referred to by homosexuals as the coming out, of a person who believes himself to be homosexual but who has struggled against it will occur when he identifies himself publically for the first time as a homosexual in the presence of other homosexuals.
(Hooker, 1969, p. 99)

[Coming out refers to that] point in time when there is a self-recognition by the individual of his identity as a homosexual and the first major exploration of the homosexual community.

(Simon and Gagnon, 1968, p. 356)

"Community" in the above definitions refers specifically to gay bars. However, a more modern idea of gay community is that it is as much a state of mind as it is a geographical place with bars, baths, restaurants and the like. It implies a sense that gays everywhere are "brothers" and "sisters." While this is a concept adopted in some sophisticated areas of the country, in most America it is still a thing of the future. In his book STATES OF DESIRE: TRAVELS IN GAY AMERICA, Edmund White gives us a glimmer of life without this notion of community:

In Kansas City I met more rejections and incomprehension than anywhere else on my travels. When I mentioned I was interested in gay life, in how gay men live, people assumed I was compiling a bar guide. Gay bars are gay life, they believe. In a bar or bed a man may be gay; otherwise he is straight - a person just like anyone else. The notion that affectional preference, sexual appetite, shared oppression might color all of one's experience eluded them.

Sometimes gay friends my age or older ask me if I ever miss the good-bad old days before gay liberation. Surely, they suggest, it was more fun in the Fifties when you had to sneak around and you

felt you belonged to a secret fraternity.

We all romanticize our youths, but a visit to Kansas City reminded me of what my adolescence had really been like. Kansas City is the Fifties in deep freeze. (1980, p. 156)

F. Disclosure definitions.

Sometimes coming out merely refers to telling others one is gay. In certain contexts, especially if the word "to" follows "coming out," this definition is acceptable. For example, in Chapter Seven where I deal with coming out and the family, "Did you come out to your family?" implies mere disclosure. More about that later.

G. Stages definitions.

Both informants and gay studies writers have defined coming out as a series of stages or steps. In section B-3 of this chapter, for example, we saw Monty give such a description. Following are some examples:

Kus: Do you think the coming out process has stages to it?

Cimarron: Mine definitely had stages to it. Because to be where I am now in my head, I had to abandon virtually the entire moral code and upbringing I ever had. It's a struggle against everything that is "right" and "good" that has been presented to you as a child. Xavier and I have been together for 8 years now, and when we look back at some of my behavior 8 years ago, we have to laugh. Because I was very, very uptight about a lot of things because I was living a straight-type mode in a gay lifestyle. One day I thought being gay was acceptable, and the next day I thought it wasn't. I had to drink before having sex; then I could excuse sex as "I was so drunk I didn't know what I was doing." I castigated "queers" and told stupid gay jokes. Thank God Xavier was able to put up with my bullshit! Anybody else would have told me to pack up and leave, but Xavier, because he was raised by alcoholic parents, was very tolerant and loving towards me and my nonsense. So now I don't find myself running around the house every time the doorbell rings and hiding this or that. I think coming out has stages, the most important of which is accepting it as a wonderful part of one's self and life.

And, from THE JOY OF GAY SEX:

Coming out, then, proceeds through many stages, from fantasies to the first same-sex experiences to admitting to yourself and then to others that you are gay and finally to identifying with the gay community. (Siverstein & White, 1977, p. 69)

And Roberts, a Catholic Brother, sees coming out as a self-actualization process consisting of three steps:

1. There is that moment of truth when the gay person realizes that he or she is gay...The period of realization may be the most painful and lonely step in the search for self.
2. Can we accept what we have found out about ourselves? Between the knowing and the accepting there can be a vast time gap... to the way we will relate to others.
3. Action mirrors our new self-image, adjustment and over-all mental health. We may start off by doing little things we never had the courage to do before. We may calmly object to a stereotype gay joke of a friend or business partner, etc. (1974, pp. 4-5)

And sociologist Barry Dank:

1. There must be a cognitive change in the coming out process. In other words, the gay youth who has grown up with the "knowledge" gays were perverts, dirty old men, child molesters and the like, must change his concept of "homosexual" as he knows he's not like his previous conceptions.
2. With the identification as a gay or homosexual, there must be a self-acceptance. Sometimes this may occur simultaneously, but often, identification occurs long before the gay person really accepts this fact as a thing of pride. (1971, pp. 180-197)

H. This study's definition of coming out.

Having painstakingly looked at some of the ways coming out has been defined by informants, gay studies theorists, and a sociologist, I can now offer a definition of coming out for this study.

Coming out shall refer to that process by which a gay individual identifies self as gay, changes any previously-held negative notions of gays or homosexuality, accepts being gay as a positive state of being,

and acts on the assumption that being gay is a positive state of being.

A secondary definition of coming out will refer to that process whereby non-gay persons, especially parents, siblings, and friends of gays come to accept gays in a positive way.¹

Each of the stages of this study's primary definition of coming out, i.e., identification, cognitive changes, acceptance, and action, will be thoroughly examined in the next four chapters.

III. THE QUALITATIVE NATURE OF COMING OUT.

Coming out is a profound psychological or self-concept happening for the gay individual. Consequently, it is not merely seen as an objective series of steps or stages by those undergoing this process. Rather, gays look upon this process with a great deal of emotion. Following are a few accounts reflecting the qualitative nature of coming out in the lives of some informants.

Carol:

Well, I'd just like to say that the coming out process is character-building. And I think it's neat. And I almost feel that people that are much in the mainstream (straights) are deprived of something really beautiful by not having to go through something like that.

¹For further examination of the acceptance process by non-gays, the reader is directed to three excellent books on this subject. The first is MY SON ERIC by Mary V. Borhek. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979. This is the story of a mother's struggle to understand and accept her son's gayness. The second is a novel by Laura Z. Hobson. CONSENTING ADULT. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1975. This is a serious story about a mother's process towards acceptance also. The story, because it takes place both in pre- and post-Stonewall years, also gives the reader some changes in lingo which occurred after the birth of gay liberation. The third book is A FAIRY TALE by S. Steinberg. New York: Delacorte Press, 1980. This zany, campy novel is the story of a Jewish aunt who begins by trying to get her nephew Solly married off to a woman and, in the end, helps him get a male lover.

Evelyn:

Well, yeah, that may be well and true, but I'm sort of real angry at the coming out process. I think that in the crucial years of my career planning and my education, I was going through a dating process that I should have been able to go through in high school. And I think that a lot of things were painful, and although they may have strengthened my character in me, maybe other people aren't so strong. Like, I stuck around with a person while they got married and let my self-esteem go down, because of the coming out process, because I didn't know anything about being gay. And I'm really mad about that, because I don't like my self-esteem to go down. And it usually wouldn't. So, I think that there probably still could be a coming out process of some sort, but you know, it doesn't have to be so mean and so drastic on people. Particularly because with gay people, since there are no role models, you don't go through a lot of things in high school, and people going through coming out in their 30's and 40's and 50's, their whole life can be an unnecessary struggle. And I think it's a crime! (Evelyn)

Rev. Eric:

Kus: Has coming out made you any stronger do you think?

Eric: Oh, yeah, scar tissue is always stronger. But I can never view the heterosexual portion of our society without some, and probably a fair amount, of distrust. I do not, and I never will, really trust the straight world. And I don't know why I should. And I do not trust the church. I don't know why I should. So, maybe in a couple of generations, our future spiritual descendents - and I'm saying spiritual in terms of sexuality - maybe it will be different for them. But I won't live to see that day. This does not mean that I don't love a number of heterosexual people, or that I don't have love in my heart for people. But I have no love for our society. In fact, I have a rather profound hatred for it. Again, what has been done to us I will never forget. I know to forgive is divine. But I find it beyond me to ever forgive them for it. Intellectually I can, because I understand only too well that they, too, have been taught. But emotionally, on the very gut level, I find it very, very difficult.

Trent:

Kus: Is there anything else you can think of that might be useful for me in regards to coming out?

Trent: Oh, hell, yeah! I think that coming out is one of the most growth-producing processes that you could possibly have. I don't think there's anything quite as powerful in my life as coming to accept myself after a long period of time. Coming out has really helped me clear a lot of illusions away about

Trent cont:

the rest of the world. At least it certainly has started me thinking and caused me to explore a lot of other things in terms of not accepting what I'm told by society at large.

Kus: Could you elaborate on that.

Trent: Yeah. Because of the coming out process, I've gotten more interested in comparative religion and philosophy. I've gotten more interested in economics and alternatives to things. And coming out has sort of helped me see how the power runs in the world. At least now I don't believe what's said to me anymore, and I think that has helped me to learn to think for myself. And now I'm in touch with the fact that I'm the only receptor of the reality that I have, and that reality and life are different for everybody. And now I know there are many, many ways to be human. I think everybody has to work that out for themselves.

The above accounts allowed a glimpse into some rather intense feelings associated with the coming out process.

Another method of determining the qualitative dimension of coming out is to extract adjectives used by gays describing persons "in the closet" and "out of the closet." Throughout this study, the reader will, for example, be able to pick out such adjectives as "free," "relaxed," "open," "okay," for descriptions of life out of the closet. Likewise, one will find such words as "confined," "uptight," "closed," and "paranoid" to describe life in the closet.

IV. NOTES ON THE QUANTITATIVE DIMENSIONS OF COMING OUT.

"Gay Freedom" purports to examine only the stages of coming out for the individual (chapters 4-6) plus one example of action (telling the family - chapter 7.)

But any ethnography on coming out, and especially one done by a sociologist, would be seriously remiss without at least mentioning a few of the societal implications of coming out as process. To understand the

coming out process of the individual without understanding its relationship to, and grounding in, a larger context, is to understand nothing. It is analogous to a person merely studying how an acorn becomes a mature oak tree and calling himself a forester, or a person who intensely studies raindrops and calls herself an oceanographer.

In this section, then, we will briefly examine coming out as a political act, as the crux of the gay liberation movement, and some areas of American life which have been, and will probably be, affected by this process.

A. Coming out as a political act.

Coming out has been described by many gay studies theorists as a political act as seen in these two slices of data:

Coming out is the process of beginning to own your whole self, especially when it deals with your sexual orientation. It is an important political statement and a personal decision.

(Lenton, 1980, p. 106)

...Open gay people are strong women and men, let's make no mistake; we have taken real risks with our lives and learned in the process how to stand tall. The politics of coming out is nothing more nor less than the spreading of this gay strength to all gays everywhere, not because closet gays are weak, for surely to come out sexually is itself a remarkable act of self-assertion, but because public coming out is a conscious political activity which expresses a person's identity with gay comrades in contrast to sexual coming out which is a private act.

(Mager, 1975, pp. 103-104)

For several years, coming out as a "political act" totally escaped me. Perhaps this is why this area of the dissertation has been the most difficult to write. But, when one redefines "political" as "societal," and when one realizes that "coming out" here merely refers to our fourth stage of coming out, i.e., "action" or disclosing "I am gay," a glimmer of light begins to shine.

a.) The gay as invisible.

A minority is "...a social group in some way or ways distinct from the dominant, more influential group of the society " (Dressler, 1969, p. 516). Membership in a minority group may be either achieved or ascribed. Achieved membership refers to choosing to be in the "not-as-powerful" group such as a person converting to Judaism or Catholicism in America or becoming a Communist in America or a Capitalist in Russia. Ascribed membership, on the other hand, is not chosen. Being gay, black, or Native American are not chosen characteristics, but rather states of being.

Unlike any other ascribed minority, however, gays have the ability to "pass" as members of the dominant society as will be explored further in Chapter Five of "Gay Freedom."

Teal reports a classic confrontation between gay activist Gary Alinder and Irving Bieber, one of America's arch-homophobic psychoanalysts, which occurred in the very early days of gay liberation.

(Alinder): "You are the pigs who make it possible for the cops to beat homosexuals: they call us queer; you - so politely - call us sick. But it's the same thing. You make possible the beatings and rapes in prisons, you are implicated in the torturous cures perpetuated on desperate homosexuals. I've read your book, Dr. Bieber, and if that book talked about Black people the way it talks about homosexuals, you'd be drawn and quartered and you'd deserve it."

Bieber answers: "I never said homosexuals were sick, what I said was that they have displaced sexual adjustment." Much laughter from us: "That's the same thing, motherfucker." He tries again, "I don't want to oppress homosexuals; I want to liberate them from that which is paining them - their homosexuality." That used to be called genocide...
(Teal, 1971, pp. 295-296)

The statement "...and if that book talked about Black people the way it talks about homosexuals, you'd be drawn and quartered..." needs a bit of exploration. Does this mean gays are weaker than blacks? Hardly.

Does this mean blacks are more numerous than gays? Not by much if at all; 1960 estimates, while probably a few percentage points off, put the black population at 10.5% versus 10% gay (white, black, Native American, Chicano, Japanese, Chinese, etc.) Americans. What it does mean, though, is that blacks in 1970 were visible; gays were invisible as a minority.

For many people, this invisibility was taken to mean that gays were not a bona fide minority as racial groups. After all, the argument goes, gays don't have lavender¹ skin and thus don't suffer in terms of getting jobs, living where they want, or entering circles of power. In this there's an element of truth, but it is most deceiving. As will be seen throughout this work, discrimination against an invisible minority member may be internal (as in alcoholism, ulcers, suicide, low self-esteem) as opposed to an external happening such as being denied a job on the basis of skin color.^{2, 3}

¹"...The term 'lavender' brings with it an implicit commitment to eradicating the rigid sex role system that characterizes mainstream culture (as opposed to lavender - or gay - culture.) Lavender is a color that has been associated with homosexuals for many decades. The color is implicitly androgenous, a combination of the male principle (blue) and the female principle (pink) which society has sanctified."
(Jay and Young, 1978, p.1)

²For the visible gay - sometimes a chosen status position through stating "I am gay" - external discrimination practices can be a reality and will be seen throughout this work.

³Black activist Dr. Huey Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party, recognized internalized oppression of gays in a letter he wrote in the early days of the gay liberation movement. In part he said,
...We haven't said much about the homosexual at all, and we must relate to the homosexual movement because it's a real thing. And I know through reading and through my life experience, my observations, that homosexuals are not given freedom and liberty by anyone in the society. Maybe they might be the most oppressed people in the society. [Underscoring mine.] (Teal, 1971, p. 170)

In sum, invisibility sometimes leads to discrimination. Discrimination is possible only when numbers are small and unorganized. Coming out leads to gay visibility. Many gays coming out leads to large numbers of visible gays. Large numbers of gays have power: "I am gay" then becomes "Don't mess with me"...(or else millions of gay sisters and brothers will be down your throat.)

To conclude this section on what "coming out is a political act" means, I take a quote from Scott Anderson's "The power of politics: Where do we go from here?":¹

Most gay leaders connect (gay) advances directly to increased visibility of gays. Notes Jean O'Leary, former co-executive director of the National Gay Task Force, "Invisibility has always been our greatest oppressor. In the last 10 years, we've come from a totally dark closet to being a household word." O'Leary insists that even the negative depictions of gay men and lesbians in the media have given a more accurate view of pluralistic gay society than ever before. "We've come a long way since THE FOX and THE BOYS IN THE BAND." (THE ADVOCATE, June 26, 1980, p. 19)

...and a quote from a pamphlet on coming out:

...Coming out also involves our standing up and being counted. Individuals who are struggling to accept their own gay identities have increasingly diverse and visible role models. Stereotypes become less and less convincing as more of us stand out in the crowd. The

¹Anderson's article is one of a special pre-Gay Pride Week ADVOCATE series. Such series are published each year and contain writings on where the gay movement has gone since the previous year and since 1969, what are some of the troubles facing gays today, and what are some directions for the future. Gay Pride Week is celebrated the last week of June to commemorate the Stonewall Rebellion in June of 1969, the birth of the gay movement as it's known today. Activities depend on the locale. In many large cities, this week sees mayoral proclamations of Gay Pride Week, media coverage, speeches by gay and political leaders, special parties, dances, picnics, sports events, and parades complete with colorful floats, marching bands, costumes, banners, balloons and flowers. For the individual gay, regardless of where s-he lives, this week is often seen as a time for meditation and reflection on the movement and the role s-he plays in it; it is a time for rededication.

gay and lesbian community, as its numbers become more visible, cannot and will not be written off as a small and freakish sector of American society. Already political leaders in a number of cities have indicated that they see and hear us and desire our votes. Our visibility has moved us closer to the protection of our human rights - the right to a job; the right to a place to live; the right to love whomever we choose; the right to be ourselves; the right to speak the truth; and ultimately the right to live in a free country without fear. (NGTF, 1970's, p. 6)

B. Coming out as the crux of the gay liberation movement.

The gay liberation movement is defined here as a social movement having two basic immediate goals: (1) to help gays accept themselves in a positive light (the 3rd stage of the coming out process); and (2) to eliminate homophobia and its resultant discrimination against gays on a societal level. The ultimate goal of gay liberation, like all liberation movements, is to abolish itself at least as a "liberation" movement; when all gays accept themselves as positive, when homophobia disappears, and when discrimination is no more, there will be nothing to "liberate."

Coming out, especially acceptance and action - saying "I am gay" - is the crux of the movement. Thus we see why Gary Alinder earlier in this chapter was ready to scream, "Honey, I don't care what you do in bed, I just asked if you are gay."

To show the importance disclosure has on the societal level, I have chosen to briefly show the reader a few areas of American society affected by the gay liberation movement. Following this presentation, the reader will then be able to effectively verbally counter the thing gays hear over and over again, namely:

The "love that dare not speak its name" now won't shut up! I don't go around telling my boss, my friends, my kids, and everyone else I'm straight. So why should you insist on telling the world you're gay?

1. Civil rights.

Because of the ever changing area of gay rights, and because this area will be discussed in other areas of this work, for now it's sufficient to say that "I am gay" can mean votes for civil rights. In Seattle, for example, an anti-gay Initiative 13 was soundly defeated. Many gays reported that their parents, friends, coworkers - and all of their friends - went to the polls to give "Mary a right to a job" and "Bruce a right to live in a house." Many of these people would have voted the other way or not voted at all if Mary and Bruce hadn't disclosed their gay identity. A very profound effect of saying "I am gay."

2. Literature.

For centuries, gay literature has either been banned, altered by changing pronouns to make it seem straight, or mistranslated. C.A. Tripp in THE HOMOSEXUAL MATRIX, gives such an example by showing some distortions in translation of Plato by a person named Jowett. Here is an example:

(What Plato actually said:) There is dishonor in sexually gratifying a worthless man or in doing so viciously; but there is honor in sexually gratifying a good man in an honorable manner.

(Jowett translates this as:) There is dishonor in yielding to the evil, or in an evil manner; but there is honor in yielding to the good, or in an honorable manner. (1975, p. 231)

Further, because the state of being gay can color one's perceptions of reality as White pointed out earlier, one should certainly know who's gay among the classic writers such as Horatio Alger, Herman Melville, or Willa Cather for example. To provide such role models in the classroom might provide gay students with a sense of pride and straight students

with a lessening of homophobia.

Literature historians are now trying to both translate gay works accurately - e.g., putting in proper pronouns in male-male or female-female love sonnets - and point out who's gay in literature.

Finally, gay literature is being produced at an all-time rate today, thus providing an alternative to straight writers who have portrayed the gay as either a sex maniac or a suicidal basket case.¹

3. Professions.

In several professions,² having a gay identity in the past meant the person couldn't be licensed as it was assumed that s-he didn't have the "proper moral character." With increased visibility, however, increased numbers of gay men and women challenged this assumption in the courts. Today, there are gay caucuses in most national professional associations such as nursing, medicine, law, social work, etc. It is from these groups that planks on gay rights originate for the entire profession to approve in convention.

¹For a more comprehensive discussion see the special report on gay literature in THE ADVOCATE, May 31, 1979, pp. 17-21; Roger Austin's PLAYING THE GAME: THE HOMOSEXUAL NOVEL IN AMERICA. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1977; and Richard Hall's "Confessions of a book junkie: Toward a post-gay literature" in THE ADVOCATE, June 26, 1980.

²A profession here is defined as an occupation having a systematic body of knowledge exclusive to its practitioners and usually taught in colleges of universities apart from the college of arts & sciences. Usually, professions have mandatory licensure and have doctorates other than the Ph.D. degree, e.g., D.N.Sc., M.D., D.O., J.D., Ed.D., D.S.W., D.M.D., D.V.D., and the like. (Exceptions are seen sometimes in nursing and clinical psychology among others.)

4. Academia.

Academia is often a world unto itself, a hallowed place, a world of ideas and thinkers. It is often a world of contradictions. From academia comes vibrant new ways of seeing the world as well as tolerance and acceptance of diverse ways of living. On the other hand, academia has produced some of the most homophobic rhetoric ever written. The professor as guru has much power; the public tends to give much more credence to Ph.D.s than to the average Joe or Jane Doe in the street.

Because of both homophobic writings in fields such as sociology, psychology, and theology especially and writings keeping gays invisible in fields such as history and literature especially, the Gay Academic Union was formed to begin to remedy these problems.¹

A word of caution should be issued here to prevent the reader from assuming that "keeping the gay invisible" is always some kind of homophobic plot. On the contrary. Many doctoral candidates in the past - and probably the present - have been counseled to avoid doctoral research and dissertations by well-meaning professors who realize that the students' academic careers could be jeopardized by gay-oriented works. Further, many professors would be more than willing to help gay students and gay studies if they had more information on such issues.

¹For excellent discussions of general gay academic issues, see Louie Crew (Ed.) THE GAY ACADEMIC. Palm Springs, CA: ETC Pub., 1978. In addition to general academic issues, there are samplings of works done by gay academics in the fields of history, library science, linguistics, literature (general, American, English, French, German), philosophy, psychology, religion & theology, science, sociology, and political science.

5. The media.

Until the last few years, the media (TV, radio, the press, and cinema) pretty much kept the gay invisible. When gays were presented, it was only in the most negative of manners. Headlines screaming "Black man robs bank" became "Homosexual robs bank." (Headlines never talked about "whites" nor "heterosexuals" if they engaged in criminal activities; such data were considered insignificant to the story.)

We are all hurt when the news media refer to crimes of criminals as "homosexual" even though the sexual orientation of the person involved is irrelevant. Reports about a "homosexual hijacker" or a "homosexual murder(er)" tend to fix in the public mind a wholly unjustified link between homosexuality and criminality.

(Stein, NGTF, March, 1978, p. 2)

Thus the fires of homophobia in the public mind could continue unabated and, in fact, grow in intensity.¹

Within the last two years, the number of programs and articles in the media has dramatically increased. And because of gay visibility as the result of numbers of gays reaching the fourth stage of coming out, the National Gay Task Force is instantly able to point out homophobic presentations such as Al Pacino's film "Cruising" or the 1980 CBS Report on gay political power.

Finally, when it has perceived that public opinion might become sympathetic to the gay, a deafening silence from the media descends on the public. The Holocaust, a movie having profound effect on world

¹ See Gordon Johnston. WHICH WAY OUT OF THE MEN'S ROOM? New York: A.S. Barnes, 1979. Chapter Seven, "The homosexual ghetto: Dachau becomes a state of mind," especially deals with the gay as presented in the media. See also literature on this topic from the National Gay Task Force.

opinion, showed the brutality and killing of millions of Jews. This same film refused to show the many, many thousands of gays killed in Sachsenhausen and other Nazi prison camps.¹ Several of my informal informants expressed to me their rage and sorrow over this exclusion. Likewise, the Klu Klux Klan is portrayed in the press as solely an anti-black group when in fact it has called repeatedly for extreme discrimination against gays.

6. Health.

As will be shown in Chapter Five, life in the closet can lead to stresses which manifest themselves in certain physical and emotional problems such as ulcers, alcohol abuse, suicidal thought. With the numbers of gays coming out publicly, health professionals have been able to more accurately assess special gay health problems and, with this knowledge, be able to prevent and treat certain disorders common in the gay community.²

¹Insignia for gays in Nazi concentration camps was a pink triangle a bit less than 3 inches in height and worn on the left side of the jacket and right leg of the pants (Lauristen & Thorstad, 1974, p. 44). Hence, we sometimes see gay places with 'triangle' in the name as in Washington State's Triangle Recreation Camp. For further discussion on the Nazi's holocaust against gays, see: John Lauristen & David Thorstad. THE EARLY HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: 1864-1935. New York: Times Change Press, 1974. See also: Barry Mechler. "In Neo-Nazi Germany" in CHRISTOPHER STREET, June, 1979, pp. 60-67.

²Two of the books dealing specifically with gay health problems are: R.D. Fenwick. THE ADVOCATE GUIDE TO GAY HEALTH. New York: E.F. Dutton, 1978; and Robert L. Rowan and Paul J. Gillett. THE GAY HEALTH GUIDE: A COMPLETE MEDICAL REFERENCE FOR HOMOSEXUALLY ACTIVE MEN AND WOMEN. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1978. Also, certain health associations have been formed to combat diseases especially devastating in the gay community. An example of one such group is the National Association of Gay Alcoholism Professionals.

In the area of mental health, a gay identity was considered a form of mental illness until a few years ago. This idea of gay as "sick" has led to an amazing variety of "cure techniques" ranging from psychoanalysis to electric punishment to "homosexual hypohallectomy." (Kus, 1973, pp. 3-24)

Today, however, the American Psychiatric Association lists "sexual orientation disturbance" in place of "homosexuality." As will be demonstrated later in "Gay Freedom," this category merely refers to gay persons who are seriously stuck in the second stage of the coming out process, i.e., they're unable to move into a stage of acceptance due to failure to undergo the cognitive changes needed to see "gay as good."

As the gay movement advances, we see more gay rap groups - "You're not alone anymore", - more gay counseling centers, and more positive presentations of gay mental health.¹

7. Religion.

For centuries, there have been severe negative sanctions against homosexual sex behavior in many world religions such as Judaism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Homosexuality (the state of being) is "okay;" acting sexually on the basis of homosexuality has been seen as "not okay." The solution has been to ask gays to either engage in sex acts unnatural to their sexual orientation (heterosexual sex acts) or to be celibate.

¹For examples of positive writings on gay mental health, see: Don Clark. LOVING SOMEONE GAY. Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1977; Mark Freeman. HOMOSEXUALITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., 1971; and George Weinberg. SOCIETY AND THE HEALTHY HOMOSEXUAL. Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1973.

In Catholicism, positive role models traditionally have been discouraged from becoming visible. Gay priests, Brothers and Sisters, even though celibate in the Latin Rite of the Church, are encouraged to not be open about sexual identity. Likewise, the gay identities of canonized saints have been withheld from the people, and only very recently have there been research attempts and writings to provide the gay Catholic with such role models.

Catholic dogma says humans must follow their consciences "whether in truth or in error." Therefore, if one believes same-sex sexual behavior is okay, it is okay for that person. Nevertheless, Vatican teachings have been very "anti-sex expression outside of heterosexual marriage." But despite this, Catholicism has a huge American gay movement both visible (e.g., in Dignity) and invisible (beliefs of much of the religious and laity.) This movement has spawned a great deal of writings.¹

Finally, unlike Protestants and Jews, Catholics have a very rich tradition of seeing non-married persons serving as positive role models. As a result, pushes by families towards gays to get married are often not

¹Examples of such writings are: Gregory Baum. "Catholic homosexuals" in COMMONWEAL. February 15, 1974, pp. 8-11; Tim Dlugos. "A cruel God: The gay challenge to the Catholic Church" in CHRISTOPHER STREET. Sept., 1979, pp. 20-39; Henry Fehren. "A Christian response to homosexuals" in U.S. CATHOLIC, Sept., 1972; Richard Ginder. BINDING WITH BRIARS. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976; Brian McNaught. "Gay and Catholic" in Berzon & Leighton's POSITIVELY GAY, 1979, pp. 56-64; John J. McNeill. THE CHURCH AND THE HOMOSEXUAL. Kansas City: Sheed Andrews McMeel, 1976; writings from New Ways Ministries; modules from the Salvatorian Fathers' Gay Ministry Task Force; Michael F. Valente. SEX: THE RADICAL VIEW OF A CATHOLIC THEOLOGIAN. New York: The Bruce Pub. Co., 1970; and Richard Woods. ANOTHER KIND OF LOVE: HOMOSEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY. Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1978.

as strong as they are for gays in other religious traditions.

Protestantism and its relationship to the gay issue is more complex as Protestantism is a collection of non-Catholic belief groups as opposed to a unified whole. Therefore, one finds a broad spectrum going from the pro-gay churches (M.C.C. - Metropolitan Community Church) to middle-of-the-road groups (Protestant Episcopal and some Presbyterian groups) to mostly anti-gay churches (Southern Baptist) to the violently anti-gay churches (most fundamentalist groups and Mormons).

Literature of a progressive nature usually comes from either the pro-gay churches or the middle-of-the-road groups and is growing in volume.¹ Most Protestant groups have caucuses within their churches. In these groups, gays come together for purposes of mutual support, worship, and creating alternative theological views on homosexual sex behavior within their churches.²

¹For examples of such Protestant writings see: Malcolm Boyd. AM I RUNNING WITH YOU GOD? New York: Doubleday, 1977; Ronald M. Enroch and Gerald E. Jamison. THE GAY CHURCH. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974; Sally Gearhart & William R. Johnson. (Eds.) LOVING WOMEN LOVING MEN: GAY LIBERATION AND THE CHURCH. San Francisco: Glide Pub., 1974; William R. Johnson. "Protestantism and gay freedom" in POSITIVELY GAY, 1979, pp. 65-78; W. Dwight Oberholtzer. (Ed.) IS GAY GOOD?: ETHICS, THEOLOGY AND HOMOSEXUALITY. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971; Letha Scanzoni & Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. IS THE HOMOSEXUAL MY NEIGHBOR?: ANOTHER CHRISTIAN VIEW. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978; and Thomas L.P. Swicegood. OUR GOD TOO: BIOGRAPHY OF A CHURCH AND A TEMPLE. New York: Pyramid Books, 1974.

²Groups include American Baptists Concerned; Disciples of Christ; Brethren-Mennonite Gay Caucus; Friends (Quaker) Committee for Gay Concerns; Kindred (Seventh-Day Adventist); Integrity (Protestant Episcopal); Lutherans Concerned; Moravians Concerned; Presbyterians for Gay Concerns; Unitarian Office for Gay Concerns; United Church of Christ; United Methodists for Gay Concerns; Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC); Evangelicals Concerned; & Affirmation (Gay Mormon Underground.) For addresses, see POSITIVELY GAY, 1979, p. 78.

Like Protestantism, Judaism is more a collection of groups than a unified whole. However, whether the group is Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox or whatever, the majority share a common heritage based on ethnicity if not absolute religious belief. Gay acceptance is more likely to be seen in Reformed synagogues than in Orthodox groups. So, like Protestants who leave such churches as Mormon and Assembly of God to join the M.C.C., many Orthodox Jews leave to become Reform.

Like Catholics, Jews have a rich history of tradition and ritual. However, many of these traditions are performed in a family setting at table. Like the gay Mormon, then, gay Jews often have much pressure to get married. From my observations of gay Jewish friends, though, traditions can be carried out by gays with lovers, friends and relatives very beautifully, successfully, and meaningfully.

Today there are many all-gay synagogues which have grown out of the M.C.C. experience in Protestantism. One of the first, in fact, was named Congregation Beth Chayim Chadashim, A Metropolitan Community Temple.¹

8. The military.

The military has by far been one of the most homophobic of all American institutions. If a person checked the box "yes" to answer "Are you homosexual," then s-he could be rejected for service and thus be black-balled for life in the job market. If one was even "suspected" of

¹For a discussion of and listing of gay synagogues and other gay Jewish groups, see Barret L. Brick's "Judaism in the gay community" in Berzon & Leighton's POSITIVELY GAY, 1979, pp. 79-87. Also, THE ADVOCATE periodically has gay Jewish writings as well as up to date information on gay Jewish national and international meetings and events of interest.

being gay, one could be summarily dismissed from the service; once again, jobs in the future were in jeopardy.

With the advent of "gay as visible" (and militant), such practices became challenged more and more frequently by national gay legal defense groups as well as the American Civil Liberties Union. It's harder and harder to make a case against numerous gays who have come out of the closet with purple hearts, silver stars, and officers' bars glittering on their uniforms.¹

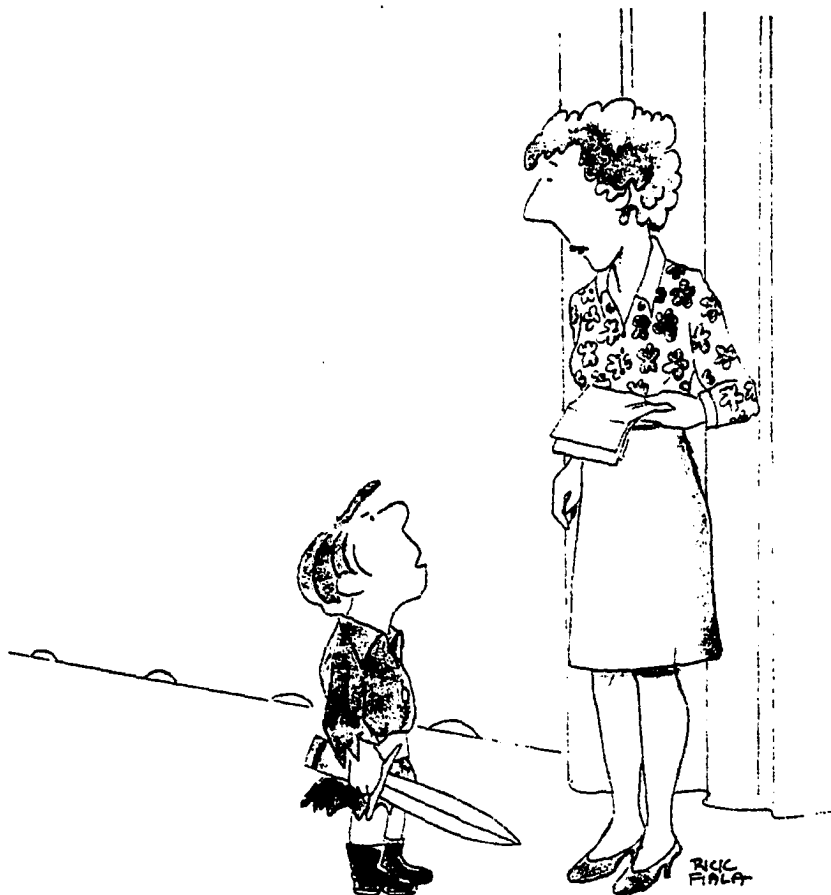
9. Politics.

As an invisible group, candidates for political office found it easy to ignore gay constituents. But, once large numbers came out, the story radically changed in many parts of the country. By July, 1980, for instance, presidential contenders Kennedy, Carter, and Anderson (who is a co-sponsor of a gay civil rights bill in the U.S. House) have all courted the gay vote.

In the last 15 years, the gay political movement has indeed come out of the closet..."Now," says long-time lesbian activist Phyllis Lyon, as she recalls when only one supervisor showed up for the first candidates' night, "they're knocking each other over to get our support. It's been an incredible snowball effect..."

The effect of gay power is being felt throughout the political establishment - and not just because a few openly gay appointments have been made to city commissions and boards around the country. As never before, gay men and lesbians have become directly involved in the political process, organizing themselves and raising funds for sympathetic candidates. Many politicians, rather than fearing the gay vote, have come to actively court it after learning how large

¹For examples of anti-gay military action, see: E. Lawrence Gibson. GET OFF MY SHIP: ENSIGN BERG VS. THE U.S. NAVY. New York: Avon Books, 1978; and Colin J. Williams and Martin S. Weinberg. HOMOSEXUALS IN THE MILITARY: A STUDY OF LESS THAN HONORABLE DISCHARGE. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.



"Why can't we write in a gay character?"

it potentially is...Openly homosexual judges have been appointed to the bench. And this year - for the first time - a sizable contingent of openly gay delegates from around the country will travel to the Democratic National Convention to lobby for a gay rights plank in that party's platform.

..."We have succeeded in taking the gay issue out of the realm of being a joke," says Steve Endean, lobbyist for the Gay Rights National Lobby (GRNL) in Washington, D.C. "People are taking the gay movement more seriously. In many cases, to be against gay rights has become a liability." A new GRNL study of how progay candidates did at the ballot box in Minnesota, Oregon, California and Massachusetts proves conclusively that support for gay rights does not automatically mean political suicide, according to Endean: "That report really documents our progress in the last 10 years."

(Anderson, 1980, p. 19)

10. Business.

When all else fails, money talks. Because many gays choose not to have children, the amount of disposable income for leisure and other goods is often quite great; this has been documented consistently by polls done by gay newspapers and magazines such as THE ADVOCATE and CHRISTOPHER STREET.

A good example of gay economic power can be seen in looking at the Coors controversy. When the gay community learned that Coors demanded lie detector tests of new employees to see if they were gay, a massive boycott of Coors beer swept California and other Western states. Shortly thereafter, Coors not only stopped the lie detector tests, but they quickly changed their policy to state they would not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, and they ran full-page ads in THE ADVOCATE indicating their new policy.

In the past 10 years, gay business groups have organized in 15 cities, and a National Association of Business Councils created (in 1980) will unite them into a single network...

...O'Leary, who was recently elected president of [NABC], thinks gay economic power will be the primary tool of the '80's. "It's going to be a very conservative decade fiscally," she predicts. "The

thrust will be in our broad, adaptable economic power. In that, there's a close parallel to the Jewish community. As businesspeople and advertisers realize there's a very real gay market, things will change drastically. Gay people are starting to put their money where their marches are."

Voeller [founder of the National Gay Task Force] agrees: "I see the '80s as bringing a whole new group of people into the movement, people with special professional services and skills. It will be a continuation and expansion of the consciousness of the '70s."

(Anderson, 1980, pp. 19 & 33)

11. The family.

All persons, gay or straight, come from families. Gays do not, any more than straights, have desires to destroy this institution. On the contrary, gays have some suggestions on helping male-female marriages improve by removing rigid sex roles, but this is not destroying the family.

Nevertheless, "The Family" has lately become a banner to rally around by some right-wing anti-gay groups. Mormons, especially, and other such groups have decided that gays, somehow, will destroy the family if allowed to be open and become enraged when gay couples (with and without children) call themselves a family.

A Catholic priest friend of mine told me that over a third of all couples coming to him for divorce/annulment counseling have a gay partner. This breakup of male-female marriages on the basis of gay issues is significant and can be seen in both my interviews and in the literature.¹

¹For more on the straight-gay marriage scene and its consequences, see: Karla Jay & Allen Young's discussions in THE GAY REPORT. New York: Summit Books, 1977, 1979; John Malone. STRAIGHT WOMEN/GAY MEN: A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP. New York: Dial Press, 1980; Rebecca Nahas & Myra Turley. THE NEW COUPLE: WOMEN AND GAY MEN. New York: Seaview Press, 1980. For a discussion of a "bisexual" marriage (which more likely is gay man/lesbian) see: BARRY AND ALICE: PORTRAIT OF A BISEXUAL MARRIAGE. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980.

Therefore, one would logically hypothesize that male-female marriages would have a lessened breakup rate as more and more gays get to the stage of acceptance before jumping into male-female marriages as either a "cure" or as a form of passing. Such would be a wonderful and most challenging longitudinal study for a sociological research team.

12. Other.

Treatment of gay prisoners, history, and many other areas of American gay life depend on gay visibility. Obviously they cannot be covered in this work, a work devoted to the individual experience of going through a coming out process. However, the above categories and notes on each should help the reader explain to self and others why many gays feel a need to disclose gay identity; we have seen, in effect, that "I am gay" is not a statement of what one does in bed.

SUMMARY.

In this chapter, preliminary definitions were given to ensure that both the reader and writer share the same meanings for concepts used in this work, "coming out" was defined and the four stages of the process were listed, qualitative dimensions of coming out were discussed, and finally quantitative dimensions of coming out were elaborated.

With this, we now enter into the heart of "Gay Freedom: An Ethnography of Coming Out."

CHAPTER FOUR - IN THE CLOSET - IDENTIFICATION

*I am what I am. What I am I will be.
Listen my fellow man, I did not chose the way I am.
Please try to understand.
I am just a man.
I was born into this world.
I am what I am.*

I was born free.

(The Village People)

INTRODUCTION.

This chapter deals with the stage of identification and its effects on the gay individual. In this stage of the coming out process, the individual recognizes his or her true identity as a gay person.

...For us, the most important fact in our lives - psychologically, socially, or politically - is not having sex, because even heterosexuals have homosexual sex, but rather saying our name, saying "I am gay." It is this self-conscious effort to gain an identity that distinguishes us from all other social minorities as well as from homosexuals in any other historical period.

(Blasius, 1980, p. 37)

As will be seen throughout this chapter, identifying self as gay can be an extremely emotional time in one's life. Not only is there no anticipatory socialization process available to the gay as there is for the black child, for example, but the identity itself is viewed by the majority of society as inherently evil, sick, or the like. As a consequence, the gay person often experiences certain emotional stress as a byproduct of this stage of the coming out process.

...To gay liberationists...coming out is an emotional catharsis resembling the evangelical experience of being "saved." It is a turning point marking the revolt against years of indoctrination and discarding the sham of pretended heterosexuality.

(Kyper, 1978, pp. 387-388)

In this chapter then, in addition to discussing identifying self as gay, I also discuss the concept of stages (including time dimensions of coming out), childhood experiences, preconceived notions held by gays before coming out, opposite-sex experiences, guilt, thoughts of not wanting to be gay, planning action as a result of identification, and special problems produced in this stage such as depression, suicidal thoughts, stress, etc.

I. NOTES ON THE CONCEPT OF STAGES

In the winter of 1975, a gay Quaker leader came to the University of Montana to provide my Gay American sociology students with a seminar on coming out. He compared the stages of coming out to the stages of dying uncovered by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. While many of the students had initial reservations about comparing coming out to dying, they did agree that the process of going from denial to acceptance was, indeed, a portrayal that had some merit.

However, life stages have been attacked by persons who have a different notion of what "stage" means than writers discussing such. This section, then, is a discussion of what stages mean by looking at some dimensions of life stages.

First, when one speaks of a series of stages being a process, this does not imply that each and every person undergoing the process must pass through each and every stage. There are many gay people,

more in the past than present, who never get to the stage of self-acceptance. However, one must agree that to accept self as gay in a positive light, one must first identify self as gay. This cannot work backwards although it's very conceivable that one may accept others in a positive way before identifying self as gay.

Second, one does not necessarily leave one stage for good after going through it. In the following slice of data, for example, we see Fabian bouncing back and forth while Terry is going from identification to action in a steady manner:

Monty:

Well, there's this one kid, Bob, who has been gay for about two years, but every once in a while, every two months, he says he's going to go straight, and so he starts dating girls and finds that it's just not his bag, you know. He doesn't like it, so he goes back to being gay and running around with gay people and having a good time, and then three months later, he says that he's going to go straight again. You know, that's fine with me. It's just that I wish he would get his shit together as far as what he thinks. I find, for example, that Terry is coming out by leaps and bounds. He knows that he's gay and that he's proud of it. I don't think that Terry will ever go back into the closet. A lot of gays I find go into panic, where they might come out for a couple of weeks and be or think of themselves as gay, and then all of a sudden they start kind of panicking and don't want to associate with gays or have other people associate them with gays. Like Fabian is that way. Some weeks he's fine; he doesn't mind gays and has a good time. And some weeks he's very quiet; he doesn't want anybody to see him with gays.

Third, it is not necessary for the person to go through all stages. To accept self as gay, one must identify self as such. However, the stage of "cognitive change" whereby the individual gives up preconceived notions of what gays are like is not needed by the individual who has no negative conceptions.

Fourth, each stage of coming out has a time dimension different

for each person as seen in these accounts asking about the time between identification and acceptance. The Rev. Eric took 25 years to accept himself in a positive manner while Terry took about a week.

Trent:

Kus: Trent, from the time that you pretty much decided you're homosexual, to the time that you said boy, I'm really happy about it, and really accepted that, how long a time period do you think that was:

Trent: I was happy with it in '76 (Age 25). I was accepting of it in '72, '71 (Age 20-21) when I was in college, and I think that I was aware of it when I was 13 or so.

Kus: So, it took awhile.

Trent: It took awhile, I went definite phases, yeah.

Cliff:

Kus: Cliff, how long do you feel you've been gay?

Cliff: About 42 years.

Kus: What happened 42 years ago that made you think you're gay.

Cliff: I was attracted towards my own sex and not so much to the girls. I thought I was the only one in the world at the time. So that's the way I've been ever since.

Kus: So, 42 years ago you'd be 10 years old.

Cliff: Yes.

Kus: At 10 years old, did you say to yourself I am a homosexual?

Cliff: I didn't know the meaning of the word then.

Kus: How old were you when you put that label onto yourself?

Cliff: Oh, I must have been about 17, 18 around that.

Fifth, it is conceivable that at least one stage of coming out may disappear in future times. Perhaps the day will come when negative pre-conceived notions are no longer held in American society...but most probably not in the lifetime of any reader alive today.

And finally, it is conceivable that one can have two stages occur simultaneously, for example, identifying self as gay and accepting it

positively at the same time. However cases of instantaneous self-acceptance occurring at the moment of identification are few and far between.

II. LOOKING BACK TO CHILDHOOD

When the individual finally recognizes his or her gay identity, thoughts turn to a look or examination of childhood. In this section we look at common elements of childhood reported in the literature and by informants. Included are the notion that one has always been gay, hero worship, guilt production, fun and games and sensitivity to things gay.

A. "Always been gay".

For the individual who reaches identification, the statement is often heard that "in retrospect, looking back, I've always been gay." This fact has important implications politically which are outside of the scope of this study. For now, it's sufficient to say that the idea that adults can "change" a youth into a gay via sex is a myth. Here are three accounts showing the idea that being gay is lifelong.

Rev. Eric:

Kus: Eric, this was at age sixteen? Now, when you look back on it, do you think you've always been gay?

Eric: Yes. I have always, as far back as I can remember, I've always been attracted to men. Even as a small child. I can remember back to when I was 2, 2½, but even in the earliest I remember I was very aware of men. In fact, as a 2 and 3 year old, the women used to laugh and say, he's really a man's boy, because I always wanted to be with the men. So, you know, there always was this attraction. That it was sexual, possibly very early, because I think that young children are very sexual beings, and I did have them, sexual experiences somewhere between ages of 2 to 3 that I can recall. With a 6 year old boy was the first sexual experience I can recall although I didn't recognize it as

Rev. Eric cont:

such at that time. I was always interested in having sexual experiences with the boys.

Tim:

Kus: Tim, how long do you think you've been gay:

Tim: All my life.

Kus: At what age, do you think, was the first time you said to yourself that, I am gay or I am homosexual?

Tim: That would be hard to say. Probably about 16, I guess. I look back now and I remember when I was about 5 years old and I remember various experiences in California, maybe I was younger too, it's very hard to say. But I remember an incident there, where I realized the fact. I hadn't started school yet, so probably I was 4½, 5 years old. Somewhere in there.

And Bob:

I'd had several encounters through the years, and when I look back on it, I realize that I've been gay all my life. I can remember being four years old and playing with the neighbor boy. I can remember in grade school being very curious about other males' bodies. I had a few heterosexual contacts, but they weren't enjoyable, and I would much rather play with a boy than a girl at that time, and of course now too. Through high school, I didn't have many gay contacts, but I did have a few -- just enough to keep me thinking about it I guess.
(Bob)

B. Hero worship.

In their comprehensive study of gay men and lesbians, THE GAY REPORT, Jay and Young reported that many men have childhood heroes such as Tarzan, Roy Rogers or Richard Chamberlain (1979, pp. 83-84). Lesbians likewise report having same-sex crushes on women. These same-sex heroes, be they famous actors, teachers, or simply peers, are often used in masturbation fantasies just as opposite-sex crushes are for straight youth.

Kus: Mark, how long do you think you've been gay?

Mark: My first consciousness of any sexual attraction to anybody was before I was in grade school, so that goes back a good long while. I can remember, I was in grade school at the time

and Joe Lewis was fighting for the heavy weight championship of the world and having a very strong sexual attraction to that whole fight scene. And that's probably my earliest consciousness of sexual attraction or sexuality if you will.

Kus: What age were you, do you think, when you said to yourself that I am gay, or I am a homosexual?

Mark: Probably I didn't put a label on it 'til I actually came out, but there never was any question; I was always attracted to people of my own gender.

C. Fun and games.

Experimentation in sexuality is a childhood phenomenon occurring in all societies. Playing "doctor," the ever-popular strip poker, and other activities are all normal and healthy aspects of growing up. Not surprising, many gays report such activities as having occurred when kids.

Kus: Now, how long do you think you've been gay?

Lonny: Well, I had gay relationships at the age of about 14 with a man. It even stems further back to the age of around 9 and 10, too. Because, when I was a young man...or a young child, I use to like to play games like monopoly, card games, rummy and stuff. And I thought that it was just a childish prank trying to get attention, you know, sneaking things in front of your parents that they don't know about...the losers would always have to take off their clothes or something like that. But I never had what you would call a sexual encounter at that age. I kinda think back, way back when I was 9 and 10, things were changing.

Straight children, however, also often experiment sexually in a "fun and games" type way with members of the same sex. But, unlike their gay peers, they eventually find they're turned on more to the opposite sex than to the same sex. This has led to two big problems.

First, the observation that the majority of kids grew up straight while some didn't, led to the formulation in psychoanalytic "theory" that gays were therefore frozen in development. As a result, psychoanalysis

became an oppressive force against gays and did - and is still doing to some degree - damage to the mental health of gays by labeling them sick.¹

The second problem caused for the gay learning that some kids go to other-sex experiences usually by junior high school age, is that s-he erroneously may believe s-he will also become attracted to members of the opposite sex. As a result, the identification process can be delayed. We saw, for example, in Chapter Three, Evelyn's anger that her natural dating (lesbian) didn't occur as she didn't know about being gay.

D. Guilt production.

The body taboo, a condition whereby the individual experiences shame and guilt about being seen naked, being touched, staring at others' nakedness, touching others, is not an inborn condition; it must be learned from others - usually the adults of the society. In studies done in nudist camps, for example, researchers find the younger the children, the less the body taboo (Hartman, et. al, 1970; Kus, 1970; Warren, 1933).

Guilt production in youth is often seen in accounts showing the child being caught violating the body taboo - especially if caught engaging in sexual acts. This guilt production has two very bewildering aspects for the gay child.

¹See especially two books by Thomas Szasz: THE MYTH OF MENTAL ILLNESS: FOUNDATIONS OF A THEORY OF PERSONAL CONDUCT. New York: Hoeber-Harper, 1961; THE MANUFACTURE OF MADNESS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE INQUISITION AND THE MENTAL HEALTH MOVEMENT. New York: Dell, A Delta Book, 1970. See also the writings of the symbolic interactionist labeling theorists.

First, the straight child experimenting in same-sex sexual activities will often be told she or he should use sex with the opposite sex "when you get married." This gives the message that sex per se isn't wrong, just at this particular non-married youth stage. The gay, on the other hand, learns that same-sex sexual activity is wrong for good. Thus, when grown, she or he will remember such parental attitudes. As we'll see shortly, this guilt can lead to some fairly heavy stresses for the gay individual who recognizes his or her identity.

Second, I would venture to guess that most American adults fail to realize the existence of gay kindergarteners. They assume that by some magical, mystical process, gays are born in young adulthood. With this ignorance, parents usually warn their sons about having sex with girls, and girls are admonished not to let the boys "go all the way." Many gay men have said such things as "Well, they didn't say anything about other boys!" usually in a retrospective humorous way.

Jon's story:

Jon: When I was home, and this was way back in the 1950's when I was in high school and just getting out of high school, I tried a couple of things with a couple of guys who didn't want to be bothered. So, they promptly went home and told their folks about it, and I was picked up by the cops for making improper advances and this sort of thing. As a matter of fact, about a total of three times. I never could admit to anybody the feelings I had. The last time it came to the point that the police required that I go see a psychiatrist in New York City. He asked me a whole lot of questions. Do you like girls and this type of thing. Anyway, I never did know the results of those. They were given to my parents and the police, and I never knew the results of that interview with myself. I still don't. I meant to ask my dad about it, now that he knows what the situation is, but I'm not sure he'd remember. But I just couldn't, and I lied to the guy, whether he knew I was lying or not I don't know.

Kus: You mean you told him you liked girls?

Jon: I said I really didn't have any way of explaining what I'd done and that sort of thing. So, my folks knew I'd done something, but at that time it was all attributed to childhood experiences and experimentation and kind of just passed over. And at the time I recall not actually being sure it was just experimentation. At this point in my life, knowing I'm gay, I look back on that part of my life as a child and believe deep down I was gay. Maybe I did consider sex play to be experimentation as a child, but I never did any "experimentation" with girls. (Laughs)

Trent's Story:

Now that I look back on it, I guess I had my first sexual experience at the age of 10. It was just a surprise to me (laughs). It wasn't really identifying more strongly with men or with women. My parents got extremely upset at that experience though, so I guess it was a significant focal point in my life. It was really funny now that I look back on it. I was across the hall with some friends. I was about in the 5th grade, and there was a set of brothers, the oldest of whom was in the 6th grade or whatever. Somehow we got to playing as boys will do. It was raining, so we were inside. The other boys' parents were across the hall celebrating an anniversary. Anyway, I don't know how it all happened, but I got talked into exploring bodies with these brothers and was absolutely shocked that your body could feel this way. I was utterly shocked and wowed, excited and everything. It seems that the younger boy was too small physically to engage in any kind of sex activity or derive anything from it. Anyway, he told his parents and my parents overheard. And my parents were horrified, and their parents were horrified. So, we went through a real hysterical scene being threatened. I was totally oblivious (laughs) to what I had done which was so wrong. The experience just wasn't all that "horrible" to me. Here I was, the first time I even knew what sex was all about; I didn't even know what you called it or that it was right or wrong. I'd never really heard of it before. I was a real religious kid and had some strong sense that I was a very good kid. At the same time, this sex experience was very pleasant. Very confusing. My mother just flipped out. She was angry and hurt and concerned. My father was the same. They were young, about 27 or 28, and didn't know how to handle such things very well. So, they handled it the way they did. An uncle happened to be there then, and that was really fortunate. Anyway, each of them came into my room as I sat there crying in utter fear thinking my father was going to beat my little butt. So my mother came in and screamed at me. Then she left and my father came in and interrogated me about how all of this had occurred. And I lied to him. And I can tell you I prayed to God that I'd never do anything like this again (laughs) if He

Trent's story cont.

just let me get out of this. Then my uncle came in and told me that sex is what I should do with girls when I was older, when I got married and all that (laughs). Oh, wow, whatever you say! So, this whole scene went on for a couple of hours. The suspense of the thing was terrible; I never actually got spanked or beat. I just was staying in my room the rest of the night as I recall. I really got into a lot of guilt things, though, because I was just terrified. So, the next day, no one talked about it, though I was certainly hanging my head in shame around the house, you know, and I didn't go outside or anything like that. It's very interesting how all these memories go back. (Trent)

E. Sensitivity to gay things.

Even though the child has not reached the stage of identifying self as gay, he or she may develop a special sensitivity to words, pictures, or other things which might be perceived as gay. Sometimes this childhood sensitivity is difficult to articulate as is seen in the account of Terry's, but often it is articulated as "looking up words I was learning" as is seen in Rev. Eric's story.

Well, all through my childhood, I'd had these little ideas running through my head, but I was never able to label them. It wasn't until actually a couple of months ago that I decided that I was a homosexual and that I desired a relationship with the same sex. (Terry)

And Rev. Eric's story:

Kus: Eric, could you tell me when you first discovered that you were gay?

Eric: Yes, I was sixteen at the time. It was in November during WW II. I knew nothing about sex really, I had had experiences with other boys my own age, kind of mutual masturbation and that type of thing. I'd also had, by this time, one sex experience with a girl - my cousin. She had seduced me (laughs). But in any case, I really didn't know about sex, but I knew I was different. In fact, when I was

Rev. Eric's story cont.:

15, perhaps during the year before I came out, I did question my mother. I seemed to be going through a delayed stage of hero worship. I certainly was very, very curious about viewing older nude men - men in their later teens and early twenties. We had a swimming pool in Moscow where I used to go during the summers. And I used to kind of take longer dressing and undressing so that I could watch others who were older than I was, not my own classmates as I was never very interested in them nude. But I loved seeing the older guys, so I delayed dressing as long as I could. I experienced many crushes, but I didn't really know much except that I was "different." For example, I didn't even know what the most common word "queer" meant then. I heard it only used once. Then we lived in Seattle for a short time while I was in junior high school, and I remember someone telling my parents about a settlement of "queers" in the city. And my ears popped up because it was kind of a funny way he said it. And I was surprised at the reaction of my parents. So, I said, "What's a 'queer'?" They told me to look it up in the dictionary. So, I looked it up in the dictionary, and I knew that wasn't what they were talking about. But I forgot about it, but it stuck in my subconscious mind. And one day when I was a sophomore in high school, I asked the girl behind me, Janet, what's a queer. And she got very red and told me I should ask my parents. Well, I knew better than to ask them, because they would have told me to look in the dictionary. And I knew that wasn't the answer.

III. PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS.

Notions of what gay persons are like abound in society. Stereotypes and myths can be either born from ignorance or from deliberate homophobic rhetoric and writings. In this section, some of the preconceived notions held by gays before identification are examined. These include being abnormal, unhappy and unfulfilled, effeminate or masculine, and being caught in straight-like sex roles. We also look at the possibility of having no preconceived notions, getting over preconceived notions as a result of identifying self as gay and exploring, and some male-female differences.

A. Being "abnormal."

Gay children, like their straight counterparts, often pick up on the idea of "gay" = "sick." Because of the scant amount of accurate gay studies material prior to Stonewall, the only literature available on gays was homophobic in nature and highly influenced by Freudian thought. As a result, many gays' first notions of what gays were like were that they were abnormal or sick.

When I read in the encyclopedia how abnormal and how sick I was, I thought I must really be abnormal. And I didn't want to be abnormal. I wanted to change, but not anymore. (Helena)

B. Unhappy and unfulfilled.

In the late 1960's, a play by Mart Crowley called THE BOYS IN THE BAND made its debut on the American scene. This play revolved around a birthday party being held by a group of gay men. One line, in particular, has become immortalized as an example of pre-Stonewall thinking about what gays and homosexuality are all about. "Show me a happy homosexual and I'll show you a corpse."

At the time the play was produced, it was generally seen as an enlightened or progressive view of the gay man. Seeing the gay as unhappy was considered a fact of life. And like many, if not most, of the stereotypes of all social groups, this one indeed did have some grounding in reality as will be seen in this and the next chapter.

What started to bother me about being gay, is that I became more disturbed about being a homosexual. It was not so much the direct stigma of being a queer or a faggot. It was later when I began to fall into the stereotype of a homosexual's life and a homosexual's lifestyle. And what bothered me most was not that a homosexual was sinful or immoral or illegal, but that I thought that his life was unhappy, was unfulfilled, that there would be no long term

relationships, just one-night stands. (Mitch)

C. Straight-like roles.

Like the previous stereotype, the notion that gays play sex roles has a basis in the past. The pre-Stonewall gay often did play roles in relationships mimicking straight society. The "butch" and "femme" roles corresponded with the "masculine" and "feminine" sex roles which are still visible in many male-female marriages. As a result of thinking the 1980 androgenous gay is like those of pre-Stonewall days often leads to preconceptions as seen in Monty's account.

I didn't want to be different than I was raised to think. I didn't want to be different than all of my friends I ran around with. I wanted to fit into the mold that I was molded in and accept everything that I was taught. Because it's hard to be something that you've been taught was wrong. I'd never been exposed to the homosexual world at all through my family or school. I kind of stumbled across it by myself. But I had also been exposed to the derogatory side of it; queers¹ and faggots² and I didn't want to be one of them.

(Kus: What did you think homosexauls were like?)

Oh, very effeminate men. I thought that they always had roles; feminine and masculine roles. If you were masculine, you would automatically have a feminine counterpart in the relationship. I'd say that was my biggest thought right there. And I read a

¹"Queer" is a term often used derogatorily to refer to gays, especially gay men. Originally the term meant "different" or "of questionable character." Why it was applied to gays is unknown.

²"Faggot" is another derogatory term used to refer exclusively to gay men. A faggot is a bundle of sticks used primarily as a fuel. In the middle ages and in early New England, witches were assumed to be gay as gay was a personification of evil. Faggots (sticks) were placed around the base of the pillars where the witches were burned and lighted. Through time, faggots became synonymous with witches or gay men. Gay men who are very blatantly effeminate are often referred to as "screaming" or "flaming" faggots. The symbolism is interesting indeed.

Monty cont:

book pointing out the bad side of gay life; it didn't paint a pretty picture, really. It painted a picture that a lot of people believe but which isn't true. (Monty)

D. Effeminacy.

Perhaps the most commonly held stereotype of the gay man is that he's highly effeminate or "a swish." Likewise the lesbian is often seen as a "bull dyke," truck driver type of character.

The common myth that homosexual males are effeminate and identifiable and that homosexual females are swaggering, "butch" types is not borne out by the facts. About 15 percent of the males and 5 percent of the females with extensive homosexual histories are identifiable. The others are able to live in society without attracting undue notice. To confuse the picture, there are a few "false positives" - people whose mannerisms, vocal inflections, or way of dress suggests homosexuality even though they have no homosexual tendencies.

The relation between effeminacy and homosexuality is most elusive. Overt homosexual contact was probably more common among the cowboys and the Indian fighters of the West in the nineteenth century than among any other single group of males in our country. Although they despised the effeminate man, they were quite acceptant of homosexual activity.

(Pomeroy, 1969, pp. 10-11)

The origins of these stereotypes are easy to understand. In pre-Stonewall times it was only the extremes of the gay world that allowed themselves to be visible as gays to the public at large. These included those in the arts and other fields which accepted gays. In fact, without the super-effeminate males who fought the police raid of the Stonewall Inn in '69, the gay life movement would have had to wait until another time to be born. The following accounts show some of these preconceived notions.

Vincent:

Kus: What preconceived notion of gays did you hold before you came out?

Vincent: Well, for example, I felt like the majority of gays were in the arts, which I was also involved with, and that was part of everybody's idea. When everybody talked or anybody did talk about homosexuality, it was usually in a derogatory sense, and it was usually at certain stereotypes and the arts was...is part of the myth. So, I always felt like I was fitting right in as far as that image was concerned. Also, I feel the general image of a gay person was somebody who was very effeminate and displayed what we would commonly refer to as feminine qualities. Maybe in dress or actions or in speech.

And Paris:

Kus: Did you have to go through some rethinking of stereotypes of what gay people were like in order to accept yourself as gay?

Paris: Somewhat. You see, I was actually brought up with the stereotypic image of a gay man as being 50's or 60's and very effeminate and with lots of jewelry. I had no reality-based behavior to check that out with. So up until, in fact, all through high school, I had never been involved with another gay person or had an acquaintance, I had never known gay people, except the kind I would hear about or the kinds of things I heard. Well, there was a teacher, in high school, who was gay, or it was rumored that he was gay, and he fit all those things. He was really a delightful man, but I mean, he fit all the stereotypes. So, that's kinda what I based it all on. And I knew that that wasn't me. There was no way I could get into that sort of thing, and no way I could ever be attracted to that sort of thing.

Cimarron's story:

Kus: What did you think "gays" were like as people before you met anyone?

Cimarron: I had had two parts to that. I had homosexual experiences prior to this with neighborhood kids but I never paid any attention to that, that was with friends. But queers...There was a banker in town when I grew up that to this day I don't know whether he was gay or not, but there were all sorts of vicious rumors about him being queer.

Cimarron cont:

He was very slight and effeminate and I would suspect in that town he was probably having the misfortune of being one of the very articulate people in town who could use the English language, and therefore he was suspect. When he drank he had 2 or 3 drinks instead of falling off the stool, logger style. So, he may have been a victim of the environment, without having any gay tendencies whatsoever. Anyone who was small, effeminate or swishy, suffered from this. A friend of mine that went to church with me, this friend I've talked to you about going with this other girl, suffered from this. He was very small and played the piano and was interested in art and was quite creative in artistic fields. So, of course, everyone teased him constantly. I didn't suffer that sort of ridicule myself, ever. I was always big enough, and even if people thought I had some sort of queer tendencies, as they put it in north Idaho, they were afraid to mention that fact, for fear that they might guess wrong. And I would retaliate with their methods, mainly physical force. I got off the track, what was the original question?

Kus: The original question was "what were your notions about what gays were before you knew you were gay and before you met an open gay?"

Cimarron: Basically, very effeminate, stereotypical swish, interior decorator, male model, type of stereotype individual.

In post-Stonewall times, there appears to be a vanishing of the stereotypical gay person (Humphreys, 1971, pp. 38-46). However, there is, at the same time, a very conscious effort within the gay movement towards androgyny, the state of being whereby the man can show affection, cry, etc. while the woman may be assertive, independent, etc. This movement is not exclusively gay but can be found in both the women's and men's movements.

E. No Preconceived notions.

In early 1975, a young man I'll call Phil (whom I talk about in Chapter Seven), asked me if I'd speak to his parents when they came to town to visit him. He had written his parents, who lived in a tiny

ranching community in Montana, telling them he was gay. Not knowing what their reactions would be, he thought it would be wise to bring them to see "the prof" in case they "went to pieces." I agreed.

After making some small talk, I asked this couple, who were simple-folk, very loving and caring toward their son, what kind of ideas they had upon getting Phil's letter. They told me that neither of them had had any preconceived ideas about what gays were like and that it was totally new to them. "We just had never thought about it." So, they reported, they went to visit the Catholic priest in their rural parish. He was most understanding and told them Phil was a good young man and if his conscience told him living gay was okay, it was just fine.

The idea that there were people in America without any preconceived notions was a totally novel idea to me...and a most refreshing one I might add!

Interestingly enough, I found the same thing in more than one account of persons from non-rural parts of America.

Kus: Cliff, before you came out, or when you were very young, what kind of notions did you have of what gay people were like?

Cliff: I don't know if I really had any preconceived notions. I wasn't brought up around gay people. I honestly cannot say anything.

Kus: You never had any notion?

Cliff: Preconceived? No. None whatsoever.

And Marty:

Kus: Did you have any stereotypes of what gay people were like before you came out?

Marty cont:

Marty: Not really. I hadn't been exposed to open gays before, so I didn't have any real negative attitudes towards them. It was more a lack of knowledge.

F. Identification and dispelling notions.

For some gay persons, recognizing their gay identity leads to dispelling preconceived notions of what gays are like; for others, this isn't the case as we'll see later.

Further, as we saw in the previous chapter where Trent talks about not believing things so readily as a result of the coming out process, many gays, when rejecting preconceived notions of gays, also begin to wonder what other things are untrue that they've been told by society. This is similar to the magic lost in childhood. "Santa Claus doesn't exist." HMMMM. Well maybe there's no such thing as Jack Frost, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy! What can I believe anymore! The next thing you know I'll probably learn that babies don't come from the cabbage patch! Good Grief!

Kus: Before you said to yourself in 1955 that you were gay, what did you think homosexuals were like?

Mike: Terrible, rotten creeps that attacked little kids. But that's not what I thought, that's what I was taught to think.

Kus: Did you believe it?

Mike: Yes.

Kus: How did you find out differently?

Mike: Probably like I said, 'cause I decided myself that I'm one and I'm not that bad a person. So, I suddenly didn't believe it anymore. You know, this also involves politics. 'Cause my mother was a Republican and precinct worker. At

Mike cont.

that time that was the Joseph McCarthy era, and she went hook, line and sinker for that shit. And I saw it ruin a whole lot of people. Communists here and there, all over. So, I got to thinking about the gay world too. What they're saying about that may not be true. So, maybe that helped change my mind.

G. Male-Female differences.

Negative preconceived notions are more commonly held about gay men than about lesbians. Why this is likely so will be discussed later in this and the next chapter.

Kus: Did you, when you were growing up, have any notions of what lesbians were like?

Sr. Theresa: Oh, not lesbians. Men, though, we called queers when I was in high school. This was the stereotype. And I remember an incident of a guy I'd been dating in high school for a brief time. My parents, or my stepmother, thought he was a really nice gay. And one day, he was beaten up in the gym because he was supposed to be "queer." And I happened to mention that to my father, and he was kind of glad I had stopped going out with him. And it was a nice way for me to get off the hook because I just couldn't stand the guy. But, no, I really didn't have any real sense of preconceived notions about lesbians; it just wasn't an issue.

IV. OPPOSITE-SEX EXPERIENCES.

In this section, the sexual experiences and resultant identity confusion are discussed. Specifically, topics include the "bisexual" phase, regarding opposite-sex sexual experiences as "unnatural," and some male-female differences found.

A. The "bisexual" phase.

Genuine bisexuality in Chapter Three was defined as an equal

physical (sexual) and psychological attraction for members of both sexes. As such, genuine bisexuality is very rare.

However, because the average person so, so consistently confuses sexual behavior with sexual orientation (a state of being), many gays often believe they're "bisexuals" if they engage in opposite-sex sexual behavior.

The gay may then have a "bisexual" identity before recognizing her or his gay identity. At the time of his interview for "Gay Freedom," Paris was just coming out of this "bisexual" phase; he's now very much out of this stage.

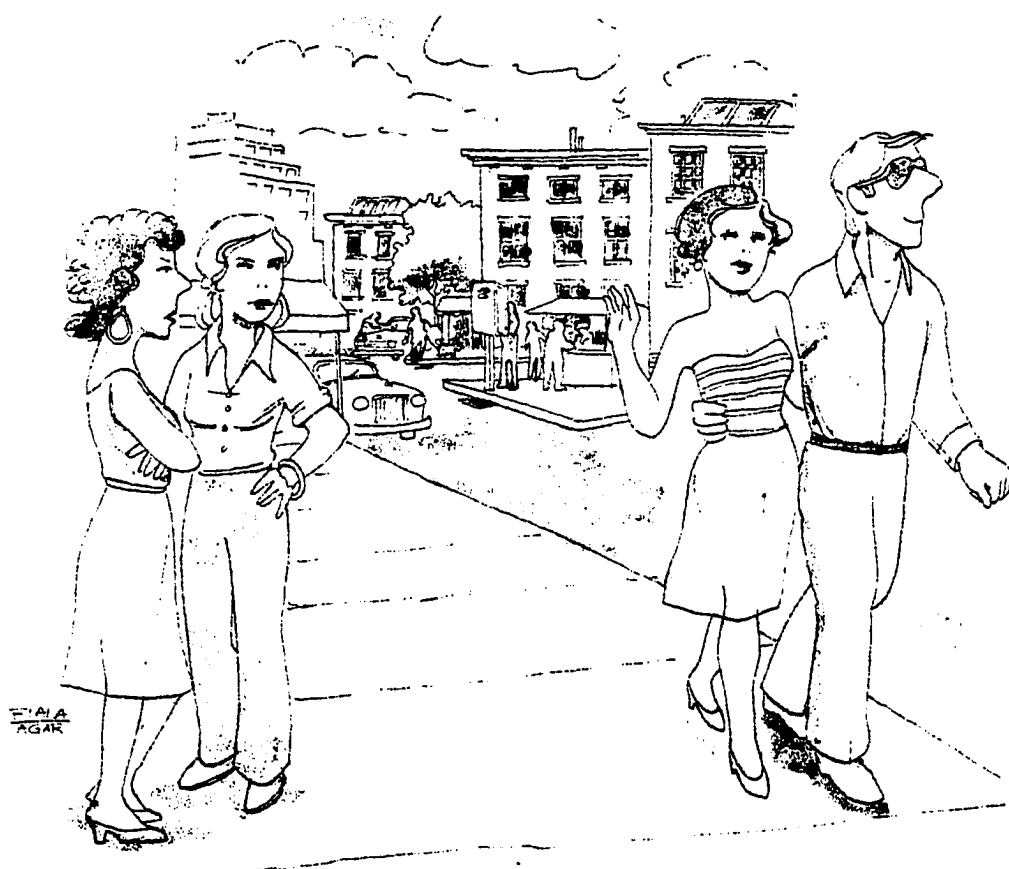
Kus: Did you ever go through a time when you said you were bisexual?

Paris: Yeah. I think that's the one thing that causes difficulty for me because even to right now sometimes, since separating from my wife and coming out, I have been involved with women. But it's been like, I guess, if you put it into percentages, maybe 20%, but there have been times when I've been attracted to and find myself either wanting the company of or the companionship or maybe, even, just sort of something that a woman has to offer. It's hard for me to put my finger on what that is.

1. Passing.

Using the word "bisexual" as an identity can be used as a form of passing as not-gay or softening others' attitudes. This is developed more fully in the section on passing in Chapter Five.

"Bisexual" is a term Stiles and I would use about ourselves at that time. In his anonymous interview for the STAR series he said he liked having sex with men as much as he did with women. That is a way of putting it, I guess, that's intended to make it more acceptable, maybe even to other football players. The word "bisexual" also fits the swingers' image and most everybody can go along with that.
(Kopay, 1977, pp. 147-148)



"Her closet's got a revolving door."

2. Communication difficulty.

Gay persons not yet fully out of the "bisexual" phase often reflect a confusion in speaking about their sexual identity. This is seen very clearly in the following two slices of data. Through the interview of Donovan, he finally distinguished orientation from sex behavior as is reflected in his last sentence.

Kus: Do you think that you've always been gay?

Paris: I would say that...most likely. I don't know, I can't remember how long in terms of...yeah, I would say so. That's a very confusing answer but...

And Donovan:

Kus: When you look back, do you always think you were gay?

Donovan: No, I don't. I think I was probably bisexual because I was erotically aroused by women.

Kus: So you think you're bisexual then?

Donovan: Yes. I think I'll have more affairs with women in the future.

Kus: In the future? Right now you consider yourself gay?

Donovan: That's a touchy question. Well, I probably consider myself bisexual right now, but that's because I'm having some problems in my relationship. Whenever I have problems in my relationship (with Marty) I tend to think if I were having an affair with a woman, it wouldn't happen.

Kus: So, you don't really consider yourself as gay?

Donovan: Actually, I do consider myself gay. If I had an affair with a woman, I'd be a gay man having an affair with a woman.

3. "Testing the waters."

Using the term "bisexual" can often be used to test the waters.

The theory here is that others who would "freak out" if they learned one was gay may not freak out so much if they learned one was "bisexual." So, to test out where people are coming from, the gay says "I'm bisexual."

Kus: Did you ever go through a phase where you thought you might want to change into straight?

Trent: No. Well, I did go through a period of counseling awhile while getting my life in order. And I mentioned I thought I might be bisexual and that I might want to explore that. But I never explored it. I really was just asking for reassurance and feedback on same-sex sexuality, not to change.

B. "Unnatural" sex.

In common parlance, "unnatural" sex is any form of sexual activity outside of male-female sex. This notion, derived from Greek philosophers and Roman jurists, was given religious connotations in the SUMMA THEOLOGICA by St. Thomas Aquinas in 1269.

Underlying all definitions of natural law is the assumption that there is an ultimate norm of "right" and "wrong," implicit in nature, to be apprehended by human reason, and thus within man's understanding. The norm is immutable, has universal application, and serves as the basis of man's behavior. (Brown, 1970, p. 461)

In literature and in my informants' accounts, sexual activity with the opposite sex feels unnatural, thus contradicting the traditional theological/philosophical idea that all persons would feel heterosexual sex as natural and thus "right." Wolf, in discussing some common elements of lesbians found in her study of a lesbian community, says many of the women experience the "drabness or 'unnaturalness' experienced in trying to date boys and not really wanting to." (1979, pp. 34-35)

Kus: Are you saying the label of gay was something you attached to yourself at age 13 or 14?

Trent: I began to question that. That I might in fact be more

Trent cont.

homosexual as opposed to heterosexual. I've always had, or at least I've noticed in my experience, that I've always had close emotional relationships with men. Like I say, I didn't really think about this until I was a teenager. I've also had some close emotional relationships with women. But somehow, I found myself more attracted to men. I also found that sexually I had a great deal more difficulty responding to women. It didn't seem to be a real natural or automatic sort of response that I have with men that I am attracted to. I guess I was about 13 or 14 when I began to think of myself in terms of being homosexual. My first sexual experience, however, was when I was 10 and it was a homosexual experience. So, that's about it.

An interesting notion which could be explored by a doctoral candidate in philosophy or theology might be that "natural" sexual activity is natural if it is engaged in harmonious with one's sexual orientation, that is, same-sex for gays, opposite-sex for straights.

C. Female-male differences.

The "bisexual" phase is seen both in backgrounds of lesbians and gay men. Perhaps because men in general tend to label themselves gay before women do, there is less tendency on the part of gay men to engage in opposite sex sexual activity than women. Further, there is less chance of gay men going through a "bisexual" phase in the path towards their recognition of their gay identity. In THE GAY REPORT (1980), Jay and Young found that while only 17% of the lesbians in their sample never had sex with men (p. 59), a full 34% of the gay men reported never having had sex with women (p. 123). Further, while 56% of women had at one time considered themselves as "bisexuals" in their past (p. 59), only 41% of the gay men had held that notion of identity (p. 127).

V. IDENTIFYING SELF AS GAY.

Identifying self as gay¹ would probably be better understood if one were to use "recognizing" rather than "identifying". "Identification" sometimes is used to refer to a process of conversion, a matter of choice. For example, persons having joined an evangelical type church "identify" themselves as "being saved." This implies that the individual may someday choose another church where "being saved" is not part of the theology. Further, one may identify self as gay without identifying with the gay community (a state of mind rather than a geographical place). Recognition, on the other hand, implies a finding of something in existence. In the empirical (physical) reality, one cannot "unfind" something any more than one can "unring" a bell. However, since most gay studies literature uses "identification," so will I.

In this section we look at ways gays finally recognize their identity. These include: reading, friends, falling in love, hearing words, and other. I also discuss some male-female differences and the idea of "acceptance".

¹The French gay theorist, Guy Hocquenghem, in an interview in CHRISTOPHER STREET (April, 1980, pp. 36-45), argues that "gays" only existed in the 20th Century. In other historical periods, homosexually-oriented persons were "sodomites" or "Uranians" or, in the nineteenth century, "homosexuals." He is not playing a clever semantic game. Rather, he argues, at no other time in history was the homosexually-oriented person the possessor of a name chosen by homosexually-oriented persons. Further, only in the 20th Century do we see a sense of community based on sexual orientation; in the past, homosexually-oriented persons got together merely for sexual activity. Today, gays band together for everything from economic strategy to political activity to religious celebrations. So, it would be more accurate to say one identifies self as "homosexually-oriented," but I think this type of thinking is something for the future, not the present, given our state of knowledge.

A. Reading.

In Rev. Perry's autobiography, THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD AND HE KNOWS I'M GAY, Troy says,

...I turned to THE HOMOSEXUAL IN AMERICA, by Donald Webster Cory. When I finished the book, I knew without the shadow of a doubt that I was a homosexual; I was gay. And there was just nothing for me to be afraid of any longer. This was it. I could honestly look at myself in the mirror, and say to myself, "You know something, you're a homosexual." And it didn't upset me.
(1972, p. 70)

From my accounts plus the literature, it seems that gays are very avid readers about what gay means. Many persons report looking up "queer" or "homosexual" or other words in dictionaries or encyclopedias. In this process, preceded often by a long process of deep introspection, rationalizations, and general "fooling self," the gay person may identify self as gay.

This process may help the person realize s-he isn't "the only one" in the world, a common initial reaction.

Mitch:

All through my childhood, I had a sense of being different, in that there were a lot of things that my friends did that I really didn't identify with in school. Sports and activities like that. I just somehow felt that I was different from these other people. At the age of 12 or 13, my brother, who was in the Army at the time, wrote my mother a letter and I happened to read it, and it mentioned that he might be being investigated for being a homosexual. And I looked up the word in the dictionary, and it seemed to describe the feelings and sexual and romantic fantasies that I was feeling at the time.

Bob:

The first time that I ever attached a label to it was when I was in the 8th grade, and I read an article about it in a magazine - about the gay life in Canada. I read the article and realized that what it was saying described me to a great extent. And then, I forced it out of my mind. Then, later on, LIFE magazine had a thing

Bob cont:

that I read when I was in high school on homosexuality, and it described the typical homosexual, and I realized that I fit a lot of the stereotypes that they were laying on the people. As far as admitting completely to myself and to my friends that I was gay, it took me until I was just about 20 years old.

Cliff:

Kus: Do you remember when you first came out and when did you first start reading these articles about gay?

Cliff: Well, they'd crop up in the newspapers once in awhile, magazines occasionally would do an article here and there, and there was nothing real definite about it, but when I'd run across one I'd read it. Some of it helped and some just nothing. But at least I learned that there was more than just a couple of us in the world.

In the not-so-distant past all material available about gays were negative. Also, positive writings were kept off library shelves and hidden in the back room; this is still done in less enlightened parts of America. And finally, any information about gay people was always listed either under "sexual deviations" or "sexual perversions" or "abnormal psychology." Barbara Gittings, famous gay activist who heads the Task Force on Gay Liberation of the American Library Association, says,

I started going to the library to find out what it meant to be homosexual. I went through the stacks, I went through reference books, I went to medical dictionaries, I went to ordinary dictionaries, I went to encyclopedias, I went to textbooks, the chapters on "abnormal psychology," sections called "sexual deviations" and "sexual perversions." That kind of labeling affects your image before you get to the material. But it didn't bother me too much because I was so anxious to read about myself. The overall impression I got was: I must be the kind of person they're talking about, because I am homosexual, and they're describing homosexuals, but I don't recognize myself in this. (in Katz, 1976, p. 421)

Using negative literature is seen in the accounts of Rev. Eric (who took 25 years to go from identification to acceptance) and Trent.

Kus: So, did you learn primarily through other people?

Eric: Yeah.

Kus: How about the place of literature? Did that enter into your learning?

Eric: No, very little. There wasn't anything on the subject. Oh, you read about the sin against nature, you read about that unspeakable sin, that kind of thing but no...I'd seen those phrases, but I didn't know what they meant. I thought maybe it might mean masturbation. But then we were also told not to do that too, it made one crazy, but I was totally naive. I think the nearest in literature that I read, I read the book about Devil's Island, in fact that was the title, and in there he mentions something and the best I could figure out was there weren't any women. They messed around together. But still, it didn't sink in. I was very naive. So, but it kinda fascinated me.

And Trent:

Kus: Did you read any literature when you were young? In trying to figure out this whole notion of homosexuality?

Trent: Oh, yeah. I use to always look it up in books.

Kus: What kind of books?

Trent: Encyclopedias, dictionaries and stuff. When I was in high school, of course they have a psychology course, and they have things on abnormal psychology, so there it was. And I guess that's what I was exposed to as a young person.

B. Friends.

Sometimes one labels self as gay after seeing open gay people and their lifestyles or by talking with friends who either are gay or who know gay persons.

Kus: What happened then that made you think you were gay?

Cimarron: I met a new group of friends at Idaho State, made friends with a kid who was a very nice individual. I had been a transfer student down to Idaho State. We got to be friends and all of a sudden I found out he had been the victim of a great homosexual purge in the drama department the year before. Most of the kids that were in it had left school but

Cimarron cont:

he was on a scholarship, swimming scholarship, so he stayed. So, I got to know him and his friends better. Decided mayhaps they lived a life-style very familiar, similar, to what I'd like to live, and so I came back to Seattle and more or less the next summer brought myself out in the bars here in Seattle.

The likelihood of identifying self as gay is probably more common in urban areas than in rural America, although television, national magazines, etc. should help rural gays identify self by seeing and hearing of others similar to self. In addition, as the number of gays becoming visible increases, the likelihood that the person will have a known-gay friend will also increase.

C. Falling in love.

Sexual experience of a homosexual nature doesn't guarantee that the gay person will recognize his or her gay identity. As Fisher points out in THE GAY MYSTIQUE,

...Many homosexuals go through an enormous inner struggle before finally accepting a homosexual identity and life-style. Even after a person has come out in the sense of having had his first real homosexual experience, it may be years before he ever comes to actually identifying himself as homosexual; society has told them all their lives that homosexuality is wrong and they are unwilling to recognize or accept it in themselves. (1972, p. 23)

Gay persons sexually active with members of the same sex often believe they're just going through a "phase" or "exploring" their "full human potential" or other such ideas. Falling in love, though, as opposed to mere sexual activity, often is the major breakthrough or catalyst which hurls the gay into clear identification as gay. This is seen in the accounts of both Tony and Marty.

Tony:

Kus: Do you think you've always been gay?

Tony: Yeah. There's some things back in childhood when I was going to the gym and stuff that I can pick out. They weren't so strong though that I realized I was gay. It wasn't until '72 when I went in the Navy that I realized it.

Kus: What happened in '72?

Tony: I was in San Diego in ship school. One day, I was out touring the sights on the river with a woman I was going with. I let her off and went to the YMCA. Two officers came in, retired officers, one Navy and one Marine. We got to playing pool for awhile, and then we went into a bar. I got plastered on my rear like I usually do when I drink. And I woke up the next morning in bed with the guys naked as a blue jay. I was kind of shocked, not really mad or anything. So, I got up that morning, lit a cigarette, and did a foolish thing...I started drinking a can of beer. One of the guys, Pat, came out, and I asked him what in the world happened last night. He explained. It really didn't bother me like I thought it would, or like I thought it should have. But, I didn't know, I thought maybe I have some of these tendencies I didn't know about. So I said to him, "Let's do it again so I'd know what went on last night." And I've enjoyed it ever since.

Kus: Is that when you said you were gay?

Tony: No. I said it was a "once in awhile thing." And I was still running around with this woman I was going with, but I found myself more and more running around with the guys. I fought for about a year within myself, saying I wasn't gay, that I was just having "a fling." I finally got tired of that scene playing straight. So, I really didn't think I was gay until about '73 when I fell in love with a man.

Marty:

Kus: Marty, how long do you think you've been gay?

Marty: Well, it's hard to say. I think being gay is a state of mind and awareness and to me it's something that developed through my youth.

Kus: Do you think you've been gay all your life?

Marty: I'm really tempted to say that. But, I don't know if that's

Marty cont:

really correct. I believe that being gay is a learned process. Well, I'm not sure that I believe that, I guess I've always been gay.

Kus: At what age did you put a label on yourself?

Marty: I would say I became aware of being gay at age 12 or 13, put a label on it around 17 or 18, and accepted it at age 19. Between about 12 and 18 I thought I was just going through a phase.

Kus: And what happened when you were 17 or 18 that made you suddenly label yourself as gay?

Marty: My feeling towards a man, as far as personal relationships and physical attraction, finally seemed to overcome some barriers that I'd set up in my mind. And then I admitted to myself that this was a factual thing that I was oriented towards men as far as emotional and physical attraction.

A comment by Marty needs a bit of exploration here. He says, "I believe that being gay is a learned process. Well, I'm not sure that I believe that." This statement indicates a sense of wonderment about the etiology of being gay or of sexual orientation. In current behavioral science thought, behavior which isn't genetic is called "learned." Most psychologists and sociologists deeply believe in this notion. Further, it's believed that sexual orientation is set before the age of three or four. With this I concur. On the issue of sexual orientation etiology, however, in all sincerity I think it's more logical to say orientation is caused by direct Divine intervention, the stars, or other such mystical happenings than to say it's "learned." But, that's a subject for another dissertation...perhaps in another century.

Until we know about the mechanism of sexual arousal in the Central Nervous System and how learning factors can set the triggering devices for those mechanisms, we cannot have a satisfactory theory of homosexual behavior. We must point out that heterosexual behavior is as much of a scientific puzzle as homosexual behavior...

We assume that heterosexual arousal is somehow natural and needs no explanation. I suggest that to call it natural is to evade the whole issue; it is as if we said it's natural for the sun to come up in the morning and left it at that. Is it possible that we know less about human sexuality than astrologers knew about the stars?

(Hoffman quoted in Kus, 1973, p. 41)

D. Hearing "words".

Often just hearing words such as "homosexual" or gay can facilitate gay identity recognition. In Helena's instance, we see how words lead to the literature. In Rev. Eric's story, we see a new-found friend defining the word for him. We also see the idea that "I'm not alone any more."

Helena:

I've always known that I was gay. As long as I can remember. When I figured that I had a label was about age 16. I started hearing the word "homosexual" along with "queer" and "faggot" and decided that I was feeling those. I knew, somehow, that I was set apart from everyone else. I'd been out with guys, but I knew that I wouldn't last with guys very long. And I would rather be with women as friends and lovers.

Rev. Eric:

But, I completely forgot about it again until I met this sailor. At that time the University had training schools for both the Navy and the Army and my best friend's mother was a senior USO hostess and she used to invite sailors to her home on Sundays for dinner and that sort of thing. Well, I met this Johnny at their home. And I really liked him. I remember he put his hand on my leg while we were playing Chinese checkers and I reacted, you know, it was very different, it was just like electricity went through me. But I still didn't know. He had duty the following weekend but he asked for a date. And I didn't know it was a date. He asked me if I would like to take in a show. And I said sure, and made arrangements for him to stay the night at our place, because everybody in town had servicemen around on weekends. That night after the show we were having a milkshake or something and I turned to him and said Johnny, what's a queer? And in a very normal voice. He got very upset and said I'll tell you when we get outside, don't mention it while we're in here. And he told me and he told me in a very beautiful way. He said

Rev. Eric cont:

there are some people who cannot love the opposite sex but love their own sex. So, after awhile, I just said, are you one? And he said yes. And we walked on some more and I said do you think I am and he said yes. And we went for a long walk and he told me more about it. He told me not to use that word but to use the word gay. Then we went home and things happened. I knew as soon as it did, I knew that that was it, the answer about myself, that I had wondered about. So, instead of being all alone in the world, there was somebody else there. Then I found out later that there were far more than just two of us in the world.

E. Other.

Undoubtedly there are other catalysts for persons recognizing identity, but the above seem to be the most common. In Sr. Theresa's account, we see identification coming during a period of introspection done while evaluating her vocational recommitment. As was noted earlier, the gay individual, unlike his or her straight counterpart, must do a great deal of introspection to fully understand the nature of his or her orientation identity.

Kus: Theresa, when did you start to think that you were gay or lesbian?

Sr. Theresa: Okay. The real meaning of gay, and not "bi," I'd say about '72.

Kus: What happened in '72 that started giving you those notions?

Sr. T: Nothing externally. It took a year of a lot of searching, questioning my religious vocation, considering alternatives knowing that getting married was something that I wasn't attracted towards. It wasn't anything in particular; it just happened that I started questioning myself in general, and that included sexuality.

Kus: So when did you finally give yourself a lesbian label?

Sr. T: January, 1976.

Sr. Theresa cont:

Kus: Now, what happened then that you decided you were lesbian?

Sr. T: Okay. I was considering a recommitment, a vocational recommitment again, and it was that searching process and getting in touch with myself on a deeper level and having a sense that somehow the label "lesbian" would fit. And then I just sort of allowed that to surface. And when it really did surface, I found it very, very comfortable, very familiar. It was sort of like coming home.

Kus: When you decided you were lesbian, did you immediately accept this as a positive thing or did that take awhile to accomplish?

Sr. T: Well, it was a long process getting to the label, but it was a process where by the time I did label myself, it was comfortable. And I actually accepted the label as very, very comfortable. Until then, I was wondering and thinking maybe I was a "bisexual", looking at my relationships towards people. I was feeling very intense feelings for women and coming to terms with that. Using the word itself was a sign of real acceptance and feeling good about it.

F. Acceptance with identification.

Barry Dank, in his article "Coming out in the gay world," says

Identifying oneself as being homosexual and accepting oneself as being homosexual usually come together, but this is not necessarily the case. (1974, p. 91)

I did not find that the gay person usually accepts being gay at identifying self as such. In fact, there were only two accounts which show acceptance coming with identification, and even these are a bit dubious as Cliff admits to some guilt while Paris still wasn't completely out of the "bisexual" phase at the time of the interview.

Kus: When you defined yourself as a homosexual at age 18, did you immediately accept the fact that you were a homosexual? Or did that take a period of time after you had defined yourself as one?

Cliff: Well, I'd read some articles on it, all that I could find.

Cliff cont:

Finally it just came down to the idea that I was gay, and you couldn't go take a pill for it, or a psychiatrist couldn't do much for you and that I might as well accept the fact and live with it. And we didn't go out and flaunt the idea that we were gay and put on the frilly clothes and go tell everybody the fact. I just decided that I'd stay a gay person. So for a long time I played this double role and had no problems whatsoever.

Kus: At that time, several years ago that you're speaking of, didn't psychiatrists make claims that they could cure homosexuals?

Cliff: I've heard both pro and con on that. I figure that I was quite satisfied with the way I was. There was a time when I was hoping I could change and really get a desire for the female side but I never had and didn't really want to change. I have lots of nice friends in the group that I'm in and so I'm very happy I stayed that way.

And Paris:

Kus: Paris, what age were you when you finally said to yourself I am gay?

Paris: Probably 23.

Kus: And what happened at 23? What made you decide that?

Paris: I guess it was my first experience in terms of being involved with another man, in a really close more than just friends relationship, in that it had a very emotional affectional dimension and it's kinda like that, the freeing up of a lot of hang ups that I had in terms of letting myself experience that and not push it aside or ignore it.

Kus: How did you feel about that when you decided that you were gay?

Paris: Good. Really good. It was something that I never really allowed myself to think about prior to that. And so, it was kinda like an opening or a just a release. A lot of pressure was off in terms of being able to feel more comfortable with myself or I guess all aspects of myself, you know, not having to push part of it away and not deal with it simply because I wasn't sure how to deal with it or because it was crazy making.

G. Acceptance before identification.

As strange as it may seem, the literature is full of stories of gays - almost always lesbians - who are involved in a same-sex coupling relationship yet don't recognize that they're lesbian. Accepting their sexual and emotional expression comes before identifying self as gay. This is seen in Rita's story.

Kus: Rita, tell me a little bit about your coming out, like when did you discover you were gay?

Rita: Okay, sure. I was in high school, about 10th grade. So that made me about 16 or 17 or so. I didn't feel too comfortable with boys my own age. Like I didn't like most of the people at the school period (laughs). But, I did find I was attracted to this one new female student at the school. She was kind of shunned by the other students because she had come from a kind of an upper-class, very sophisticated larger school, and she didn't really fit in this rural school very well. So, we had something in common with each other: I had a rapport with her because I wasn't in with most of the other kids, and she was an outsider to the scene. Anyway, we would have lunch together, have classes together, and see each other quite a lot at school. And then I don't know exactly what happened, but one day I was looking at her from across the room. Suddenly there was something about her shape that turned me on all of a sudden; I can remember this as clearly today as I did that day. I didn't realize what was happening, but it hit me that she was very attractive. I didn't think anything was wrong with it, but I was sure hit me strongly. Then, in order to get some of our mutual feeling out in the open, we did something very strange. Like we were sitting in our study hall sitting across from one another, and we started playing these roles. We played these gays where she'd be one thing and I'd be another thing. And all of a sudden I said, "Okay, I'm going to be a psychiatrist and you're going to be a lesbian." I think that's the word I used. "And you can tell me how you feel." So, she started saying these things like that she was very attracted to this one woman at school who was really a good friend of hers, right. And I'm thinking, oh, my God, you know, it's just opening up right here in front of us. And it seemed totally natural and great. Then we reversed the roles; it was like safe within this context of playing roles. Then she was the psychiatrist and I the lesbian. So,

Rita cont.

then I did it, and I said basically the same things she did, except I came across a little more indicating it was her. And then I said, "Well, what should we do about it?" And then we just kind of dropped it at that for several days. Then, I guess it was a couple of weeks later, we decided to get together for a weekend. I went over to her house, and that's when I knew I was really in love. Like it was really strange, because I'd never had any sex relations before with another individual, male or female. And it just happened that weekend, you know. I just felt totally comfortable with the situation from the start. She did not, though, eventually. By the end of our senior year in school, after having had a two-year weekend affair type of thing, she started to feel some guilt about it. Well, I guess not actually guilt, but rather she wanted to be socially acceptable. So, she started dating a lot of the older guys, not really that it bothered me, you know, but I felt like she had to do her own thing. I think I was more mature than I am now (laughs). I said, "Go ahead and check it out and see what you really want." So, she did that and she really didn't like the guys. It was because she was doing something to prove a point, and it didn't work because it wasn't real. There weren't that many emotions involved with the guys, and our relationship was entirely emotional. So, she wasn't satisfied with the guys but, at the same time, didn't feel it was socially acceptable to be in a gay relationship. So, she didn't want men, but she also didn't want me. My feelings were really hurt at that point. So, I said, oh boy, and I went through some very heavy changes there for about a week. School was out for the summer, and I stayed in bed for a week. And I thought I was going to die, you know. I was just physically a wreck.

After having this experience with her friend, Rita found herself in a coupling relationship with another young woman. She still didn't label self as lesbian until after they had broken up.

H. Female-Male differences.

1. Timing.

The age at which men recognize their gay identities generally occurs

before that of gay women. Jay and Young (1979) found that a full 68% of the men identified self as gay by the age of 15, while only 39% of the women had done so by age 15. By age 19, 84% of the men knew of their identity and 64% of the women did.

This reflects a couple of things - a double standard operating and anatomical differences.

In our society, boys and men traditionally have been given a good deal more leeway to explore sexuality and to talk "dirty." Girls and women, on the other hand, have been taught that it's "unladylike" to cuss and use sexually-oriented words in speaking. As a result, boys tend to have a much larger repertoire of sex knowledge. In her study of female impersonators, for example, Esther Newton talks about her difficulty following many of the sexual-oriented jokes told by the entertainers while the male members of the audience had no problem following the dialog nor in understanding the words.

As a general rule, middle-class men know a great many more "dirty" words and allusions than middle-class women, especially if the men have been in the Armed Forces. It took me a long time and many questions to acquire the knowledge of "our" culture's sexual terminology. (1972, p. 95)

Secondly, males are very able to tell to whom they're turned onto sexually by virtue of having erections. Many, but not all, men report the childhood fear they experienced in same-sex nude situations such as the locker room; the fear was that they'd get an erection seeing naked males around them. For some, athletics was ruined simply because of having to shower. For the straight adult, who doesn't realize the existence of gay children, this concept may be difficult to grasp. I therefore supply the following example.

Imagine a straight male youth in high school being expected to shower with all females. Imagine further than the norms of society, reflected by his female peers, say that if he gets an erection in their presence it indicates a "perversion." Further, imagine that the same happenings which occur in an all-male high school locker room are occurring, i.e., ass slapping, "goosing," sexual talk, and the like. One can get a better understanding of what it's like for male gays growing up through the process of saying "It would be like..." and then substituting an all-male atmosphere with an all female atmosphere.

2. The tomboy and the pet.

One area which hasn't been explored in any depth, and which would make for a wonderful ethnographic study, is the idea that many gay children tend to engage in a stereotypical way. This idea came to me as I compared two hilarious and entertaining books on "growing up gay."

The first is RUBYFRUIT JUNGLE by Rita Mae Brown (1973). This is a novel of a girl named Molly growing up as a tomboy. Does this, in fact, reflect reality for lesbian children? While I didn't explore this with my lesbian informants, I did find some evidence from research:

In our society a girl who is assertive and rebellious is sometimes granted a period of immunity before she must acquiesce to the endless restrictions and conditions of the female sex role. This is the tomboy phase, a period of grace, a free time before rules of femininity are enforced. The tomboy is tolerated and jollied along humorously. She may even be admired. Men may say, "for a girl, she's got guts."

One on-going study by psychologists at the Post Graduate Center for Mental Health in New York City shows that of 225 lesbians, 78 percent reported being tomboys in childhood versus 42 percent of the control group of 233 heterosexual women.

(Abbott and Love, 1972, p. 21)

The second book is an autobiography of "John Reid" called THE BEST LITTLE BOY IN THE WORLD (1973, 1976). This shows the gay boy growing up very well mannered, high achieving, anxious to please. He's the kind of kid adults love. He's the type of person a mother might use as a model comparison: "Why can't you be like your (gay) brother?"

Kus: Paris, you read the book The Best Little Boy in The World. I'm beginning to wonder if perhaps gay men, in particular, are the best little boys in the world when they're growing up, as opposed to their straight brothers?

Paris: From my own personal experience, definitely.

Kus: How was that?

Paris: I was the oldest. From a very early age, I don't know whether I'm just more sensitive or able to pick up on things more easily than my brother, but I figured it out really easily in terms of what I had to do to get things from my parents. What they wanted, what the expectations were, and how to play their game. So, it was good grades you want, I'll give you good grades. You want me to, you know, be involved and have friends, ok, watch this. And I would do it, and everytime I would perform for them, I would get lots of nice rewards in terms of, you know, you're just everything a parent could ask for, de tum de tum de tum. That's the way I was all the way through my childhood and adolescence. It was just picking up on what my parents or other people wanted, at school, my teachers, just picking up on it and giving it to them. I got some satisfaction out of it, I don't know what you call it, but always feeling just a cut above the others. My brother on the other hand is just the opposite. He's never given them what they wanted and he's always referred to as that Ken, that Ken, why can't he be more like his brother. (Laughter) If they only knew.

Kus: Among your gay men friends, do you feel that that's a common thing?

Paris: I would say at least in half of them. For sure. Really into goals, or if not into goals then very motivated. Keyed in towards just performing. Kinda high energy, success kind of, success driven, it's a hard thing to describe but very high energy, kinda getting things to please other people. Getting I don't know what it is I got from them internally, but I

Paris cont:

kept on doing it, it was something, to go ahead and keep it up.

The role of the best little boy in the world (TBLBITW) is not only tolerated throughout life, but it is very highly rewarded with good occupations, finances, and praise. Not so the tomboy. This role may be praised up to a certain age, but then the axe drops and adults set out to "make a lady" out of the tomboy.

Finally, while the tomboy is often given praise for her athletic prowess, gutsy, swashbuckling way of living, a young boy may never be a "sissie" and tolerated. A parent may say "Yes, she's our little tomboy" with pride, but never "Yes, he's our little sissie." A sissie and a BLBITW are not synonymous.

3. The "cat" and the "nester".

A final difference to note between men and women in identifying self as gay is that men often go through an initial period of intense promiscuity or an "explosion of freedom." This observation is made in both fiction and non-fiction of gay writers. Whether gay men are initially more promiscuous than their straight brothers is unknown to me. The following two accounts address themselves to this issue. As we see, Donovan, who's in an early stage of cognitive change, is somewhat disillusioned.

Kus: So, you're pretty happy you're gay?

Donovan: No, not really. I'm not that happy that I'm gay. No. I think I should also include value systems. I don't think that my value system is congruous with the gay community as a whole. I think that the majority of gay people, I don't like, because I don't share their values.

Donovan cont.

Kus: Elaborate.

Donovan: Okay. I think that gay people on the whole, or at least from what I've seen, are much too promiscuous. I think they're much too fickle, just unresponsive to others' needs or not as responsive as I would like. That's how my thinking is different.

Kus: Do you feel straight people are?

Donovan: Well, I think that straight people have shared values similar to that. I think it's more common for straight people to settle down and raise families, and gay people don't have families often, so it's very difficult to settle. Even though Marty and I have been lovers for 3 years, it's always been touchy mostly because one of us wants to go out on the town, usually not me, and just have sexual relations with other people or even just relations with other people. The whole (laughs) parallel of relationships to me is just two people who start sharing. That's why I have a great deal of trouble associating with the gay community as a whole.

Xavier:

Kus: Some people have told me that when they first came out sexually, there was a period of great promiscuity. They just couldn't get enough sex. Then, after a time, they mellowed out some more and had sex with fewer people and less frequently. Does that strike you as a common thing?

Xavier: Definitely. Absolutely. Very definitely. Not being the greatest Adonis in the world, I still had as much as I could or wanted even up until the time I formed a lasting relationship. I can still remember the first couple of years; I was late to work almost all the time because I'd get started dressing and end up in bed. But, it's waned away to nothing now. And that's fine with me. But, yes, definitely to your question. I think relationships are long lasting or short lasting based solely on sex. And from there on it gets less and less (laughs). At least I think it's less and less with the same person. But I don't know about people who aren't in a relationship. Whether they have less sex or more I don't know. But, up until the time I formed a relationship, I was having sex as often as I could get it. Once the relationship started, we had sex quite a bit the first two or three years. But then over time it mellowed away to nothing and it doesn't bother me.

Lesbians, on the other hand, tend to couple early on in the identification process and tend to continue with this pattern through life at a greater rate than gay men. (Jay & Young, 1979, Chapters 8 & 9)

Kus: It seems that some men report that when they first come out, they go through a period of very high promiscuity. It seems less of an issue with women. Do you find that?

Rita: As a general rule, the females in their relationships tend to have longer lasting relationships, at least the ones I know. It's not a different person every night even if it's only for a month duration. That's not typical of the male when he first comes out. I think basically women are not as promiscuous in our society in general whether it's heterosexual or homosexual. And for males it's okay for them to have several escapades whether gay or straight; they're supposed to show their sexual prowess. But females are supposed to say hey, I'll be a little more selective and then try to make an emotional relationship that lasts. So, I think there's less promiscuity among women. That's just a function of our society under the double standard.

VI. GUILT.

In their first chapter of SAPPHO WAS A RIGHT-ON WOMAN, Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love say:

Guilt is at the core of the lesbian's life experience. It is her heritage from the past; it controls her present and robs her of her future. The dynamics of guilt pervade and order her days, draining her energies. Once set in motion, guilt works almost as an autonomous mechanism independent of the individual's will or of the original cause. Because guilt becomes a constant, internal force, actions of flight are of no avail: the lesbian withers under its influence, or is forced to try to understand it - historically and personally - and vigorously to struggle free of it. (1972, p. 19)

Granted, this was published in 1972 rather than 1980, and granted this is a rather all-encompassing statement which omits lesbians who don't ever experience guilt, but guilt does play a large part in the identification stage for many, many gay men and women.

Guilt, in the right amount, is functional for both the individual and

society. For the individual, a sense of right and wrong - a "gut-level" feeling - helps guide the individual in the journey through life. It serves as a continuous refocusing mechanism of behavior and can lead to changes in behavior. For example, a nurse may be very curt or express impatience with a particularly slow or troublesome patient. He may go home, being off duty and think why was I so impatient and curt with her? There was no need for that (I feel guilty!) Well, from now on I'll resolve to do better!

For society, guilt can serve to ensure the social order. Without guilt, the social order would have to rely merely on the fear of punishment or desire for rewards for people to obey laws.

On the other hand, guilt can be extremely counterproductive to the individual's self-esteem and mental health. It is this overwhelming kind of guilt to which this chapter section is devoted.

Why "guilt" has a whole section rather than being placed as another "special problem" of the identification stage in section VIII, is this.

First, because guilt can so overwhelm so many gay persons in this stage, it's listed separately to show its crucial role in understanding how this stage can be so "crazy-making" for the individual.

Second, I hypothesize that guilt is the underlying cause of many of the problems listed in section VIII for many persons.

In this section we examine some of the causes of guilt, some effects of guilt, and finally some ways of overcoming it.

A. Getting into it.

The roots of guilt experienced by the gay in the identification

stage are numerous and diverse. Among some of the more common ones are the beliefs that gays are intrinsically "sick" or "sinful" or "unhappy." In addition to these root causes of guilt, there are two other factors operating which bear mentioning.

One is the notion of a special "gay sensitivity." Although this is discussed more fully in Chapter Six, for now it's sufficient to say that many gays believe they are more "sensitive" than straights. They feel more things and more deeply. This kind of gay sensitivity was alluded to in Paris' account of his experience as "the best little boy in the world", i.e., an ability to pick up very early on to clues of what kind of behaviors will bring rewards such as high grades.

The second notion is one I ran across in my readings. The author made the remark that unlike any other American minority, gays as a group don't have the "innocence" of racial and other minorities. One doesn't, for example, see the black person as intrinsically evil by virtue of skin color regardless of how prejudiced the person may be against blacks. Also, I think, a sense of "innocence" may be lost because most Americans fail to realize that gay children exist and consequently see the gay as adult only. Finally, this idea may have its origins in the false belief that gays have "chosen" their sexual orientation.

Following are four accounts showing sources of guilt felt in identifying self as gay. The first three are rather common and show the idea of gay as "sinful" or "family-hurting." The fourth shows a not-so-common source of guilt, i.e., feeling guilty about looking at youthful bodies.

Lonny's story:

Kus: So, at age 14 when you said you were gay, how did you feel about that?

Lonny: I thought it was very sinful. Because I had heard my grandparents and my aunt and uncle speak of certain people who were homosexual, and they considered it wrong. I was just raised that it was wrong, that's all. I did not ever want to convince myself I was, because I did not want to be wrong.

Kus: You felt pretty guilty?

Lonny: Yes. Because with this certain man I'm talking about, at age 14, my parents did not know he was gay, or my grandparents. Neither did my aunt and uncle. At this time at 14 is when it was one big happy family. I had 4 stepparents; we all lived together. And being of a religious family, and this man was as Episcopal priest. He was physically attractive to me even though I was 14 and I don't know how old he was...let's say 35 or older.¹ He would ask my grandmother if he could have me on the weekends. Anytime my grandmother's little boy got to spend the weekend with the priest, she was delighted, because she thought it was more religious upbringing, even though religion was never brought up. He would just want me for weekends and he was trying to show me gay life. Just between the two of us, I was always scared and got to the point after two encounters with him that I would not want to go back to his house, but my grandmother would push me anyway. And I would end up going. I would plead with him, let me sleep in another room. But through talking with him, he always managed to get me in bed with him. It finally ended when he got transferred. We had about ten different encounters.

¹It's wise to point out here that child-adult sex is virtually an exclusively straight (heterosexual) phenomenon (Fisher, 1972, 26; Hoffman, 1968, 92; Loovis, 1977, 8). Second, it's been reported by many gays in informal discussions with me that "seduction" usually is done on the part of the teen towards the adult, not the other way around. Third, adult-"child" sex often is between teens, one being of age to be considered "adult" while the other, even if a year or less in age, is considered legally a "child." Fourth, because gay persons tend to be much less violent (Hoffman, p. 93) than straights, gay teen-adult sex is almost always consensual rather than forced. Finally, because it's generally conceded by behavioral scientists that sexual orientation is formed by age 3 or 4, if not sooner, sex with an adult cannot cause a youth to "turn into" either a gay nor a straight.

Lonny's story cont.

Kus: How did you get over the guilt of being gay or did you?

Lonny: I didn't get over the guilt of being gay because I had more gay encounters after that. I had several friends in high school who were gay, and I hung around with them. But I would enjoy what we were doing together, but I would always have that funny gut feeling and would shake a lot after doing something "wrong" - what if I were to get caught! I was always scared of getting caught and sent away or something. When I was 21 or 22 years old, I moved out of Seattle for awhile, and I was living in Las Vegas. I had gay encounters down there with people - with men. I'd still have that scared gut feeling, even though I was a mature young man. I was grown up. I was out of the nest. But I'd still have that scared gut feeling.

Cimarron's story.

Kus: When you said to yourself, "Wow, I'm gay," did you feel guilty about that?

Cimarron: Yes.

Kus: Talk about that.

Cimarron: There's several areas there. And to this day, I still suffer from the family aspect. The family is very blue-collar oriented. My sister's an R.N., but father is a construction worker. My brother was a construction worker, but he's coming around as he's into a leadership position in the union and has had to meet with a full-spectrum of humanity; he's far less red-neck. But I was raised where there were no gray areas whatsoever in life - it was all black, all white. I went to a very small fundamentalist church. RLDS is very strict to begin with, but this was an in-grown group. The church was built in 1908, and most of the folks that laid the bricks were still holding power, including my grandfather. Such things as morality were very strict. My sister, when she was 15 or 16, was wearing a terry cloth peasant type top that covered clear from above the breast completely down to the waist of the skirt. My grandfather raised such total, complete hell with her about that, that she ended up in tears at the table. When my aunt was growing up, she wasn't even allowed to go to dances if the principal of the school came and got her, watched her dance and brought her home. Okay, so this was another aspect of morality. Of course gays were never mentioned because they were too busy talking about the sin-ridden possibilities if you should happen to kiss a girl. The mere thought of mentioning homosexuality at all..!

Cimarron's story cont.

...it was hinted at but never brought out in public. You always knew the taboo areas. Sex at all was not to be mentioned in any way, shape or form. Normal pregnancy, if adults were in the room, was referred to as being in a "family way" if the woman was 8½ months pregnant. But that's the limit in the type of area I grew up in. Just very, very rigid. Xavier and I have been together for over eight years now. We go everywhere together, vacation together, this sort of thing. Everybody involved knows the situation, but I can't tell the family. And this is not honest for Xavier, so I feel guilt about it. But my family just isn't ready for it yet. And if they were to find out, I would wish there could be some kind of societal ritual they could go through to make sure they had gotten rid of their guilt and blame for having created a gay person. But, at present, we haven't gotten to that plateau. I don't know. Maybe at a later date we'll have a discussion, but for now, no.

Kus: So, the guilt that you felt revolved around and stemmed out of your religion and also your family and how they viewed their religion?

Cimarron: Right. The religious views and the reinforcing factors of the little, close-knit society we were in. Only certain behaviors were acceptable. When I went to school to become a teacher, they thought that was ghastly because that was a woman's job. Taking jobs away from potential widows who needed to support their families. When I was a sophomore in high school, I had worked one summer and bought a motor scooter. Certain members of the community would not allow their children to associate with me thereafter. This was a 5 horsepower, all-state Vespa type motor scooter. That again made me a Hell's Angel motor cycle type to them, so I was not socially acceptable to families in the area. And that was in '61, so that was 17 years ago. And they haven't spoken to me since in these 17 years over this. So, that was the type of community I grew up in.

Kus: If they didn't want you to be a teacher, it's a good thing you didn't decide to be a nurse! (Much laughter.)

Cimarron: Don't you know it! But nevertheless, my family is good people. I hold no grudges against them. But the community is so closed minded!

Bob:

I went through a whole lot of guilt. Part of it was because of my religious background. I thought it was sinful. Part of it was just because of society's rejection of homosexuals.

Skip:

Kus: Skip, do you feel guilty that you're gay?

Skip: Guilty? Maybe I used to, but I know I'm not comfortable any other way now. I guess I feel guilty in certain ways, but I know for my own mental health that I can't really feel guilty any longer.

Kus: How did you get over that guilt?

Skip: Well, I haven't really completely gotten over it. I just put it in the back of my mind.

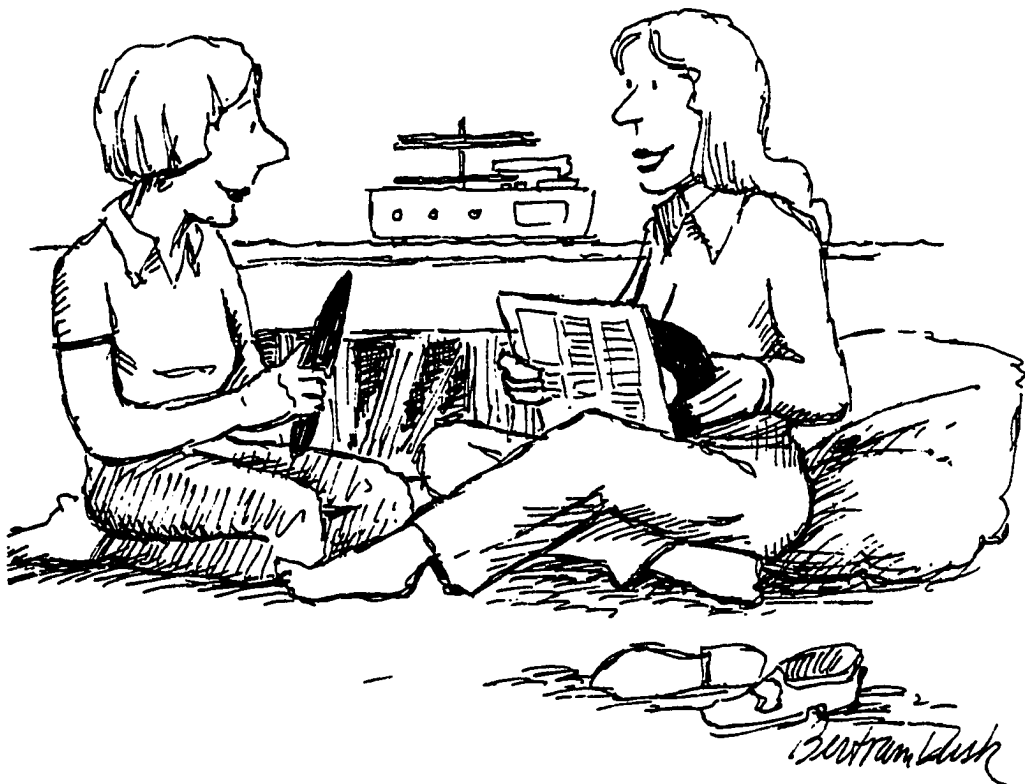
Kus: Has this counseling helped you work through the guilt?

Skip: Well, I don't know. Guilt. I only feel guilt at certain times. I don't really feel guilty after I've had sex, but I feel guilty when I look at young males, you know. I have a lot of nieces and nephews and cousins and things like this. And I feel that if the adults thought I was gay, that they would try to hold these people away from me. That's my fear. And I don't think that's fair, because I wouldn't try to have sex with somebody that didn't want to have sex with me, and I wouldn't try to make a younger person gay. I think that's where most of my guilt comes in.

B. Effects.

Severe guilt of a non-productive nature can produce many problems for the individual's self-esteem and performance of daily life tasks such as doing one's job. It can be a very pervasive thing clouding one's very being. It can be a 24-hour-a-day, 7-days-a-week phenomenon.

Not surprisingly, guilt can delay one's reaching a level of self-acceptance as was seen in Rev. Eric's account earlier where it took him 25 years to overcome guilt.



"Oh, it wasn't as early as 'Sgt. Pepper'—I didn't come out until 'Abbey Road'!"

Finally, guilt can lead to special problems for the individual such as suicide, depression, alcohol abuse, ulcers, and the like.

Lance's account shows the pervasive nature guilt can take, and Tony's account provides us with an example of how guilt can prevent one from doing basic life tasks such as holding down a job.

Lance:

Kus: Did you ever feel guilty about being gay?

Lance: I did for a long time. I'm finally coming out of it now. I don't have guilt feelings anymore. I guess it's been in the last year or so that I found myself not feeling guilty. I'm just kind of taking the attitude of "what the hell." What I am, I am. I'm going to be this way the rest of my life, so there's nothing I can do.

Kus: So, in other words, from the age of 13 to 24, you were working through guilt?

Lance: Yeah. There was a lot of guilt on me. I finally just got quite pressured and knew I needed to change. I did seek some professional help, for about six months, when I was in college. That helped straighten me out quite a bit. I really got over guilt feeling a log. And you know, when you're pressured by guilt feelings, it seems that they're there constantly, so I had to cope with my guilt and cure it so to speak. I had to learn to accept myself and let the guilt feelings go.

(Lance)

Tony:

Kus: Did you feel guilty during this time when you were thinking you might be gay?

Tony: Yeah, quite guilty. It was quite a head trip for me. I wasn't keeping a job within that time period because I was always thinking something was wrong with the job and that that was why I was feeling guilty. I tried to put the blame on anyone or anything else rather than myself.

C. Getting over it.

To get to a stage of self-acceptance, one must somehow rid self of

guilt feelings about being gay.

1. Family acceptance.

Acceptance by one's family, as we'll see in Chapter 7, often helps the individual reduce guilt and feel good about self. On the other hand, rejection can lead one to have an even deeper sense of guilt.

2. By self.

Many older gays, as well as many young ones, report that getting over guilt was "just something I had to do" because there was no one else around with whom to hash it out. The double problem of feeling that "I'm probably the only gay person in the state" and hiding in the closet can leave to the person to fend for himself or herself. This is seen in the accounts of Tim and Mike, both of whom came out of guilt rather quickly.

Tim:

I came out very young. Let's face it, in looking back, I was probably about four years old when it happened. There were probably times when I was ashamed about it; I think we all go through this. But I think the older you get, probably the wiser you get about it. And you learn that you have to live with yourself. And there are times when it can get awfully much for you, and there are times when I'm called a lot of things that hurt a little. But I survive.

Mike:

Kus: When you discovered that you were gay did that make you sad?

Mike: Yes. For like about 10-20 days, yeah. Very sad. Do you want the follow-up to that? (BK: yes) Then you get thinking, if you like yourself, you think, you're not a bad person. So there must be a whole lot of other people in the same boat who are not bad people, either. So you get over it.

Kus: And you did all this in 10-20 days?

Mike cont:

Mike: Yes. I did. Stayed very, very involved in politics. Campus politics, not Republican, Democrat, just stayed busy in the college community.

Kus: Did you feel guilty about being homosexual?

Mike: Yes.

Kus: How did you get over that? Or did you?

Mike: That was in the same 20 days.

Kus: You did that all by yourself?

Mike: There was nobody I could talk to.

3. Meeting other gays.

One of the quickest ways to get over guilt appears to be meeting lots of other gays with whom one can identify. This also helps dispel preconceived negative notions on what gays are like. This is seen in the account of Paris. Previous to going to college, Paris' notions of gay men were that they were caricatures of effeminacy.

Kus: Did you ever feel guilty about it?

Paris: No. Not after actually coming out and getting involved with other gay men. I can remember around the ages of 20 or 21 when I was in college that suddenly one year it seemed like at least four or five people that were living on the floor of the dorm where I was living were either gay or bi or had experienced something along this line. It was something that I hadn't really even thought of it. I definitely found myself attracted to men in the past, but it was something I could easily write off or ignore. It was something that yeah, we're good friends or we did this together, we did that together, and it wasn't something that I really would fully acknowledge as yes, I'm definitely attracted to this person. At the time I was doing all the supposed things that you're brought up to do in terms of dating women and being attracted to women and everything.

4. Counseling.

Counseling is often used as a device to rid self of guilt feelings. This can be done by regular counselors who are either gay or knowledgeable about gays, or it can be done by specialists who deal with, for example, religious hangups solely.

Lonny:

Kus: What happened at age 23 that made you accept the fact that you were gay?

Lonny: Well, I've always been gay, but when I was 23 I met a young man at a health club, and we had a relationship. And at the time, I was going through a very religious thing in my life and even thought of entering a monastery and becoming a monk. And then I realized I was gay, because of this young man. I didn't know which way to turn, so I sought professional help. The counselors told me not to worry about it, everything's fine. They explained the love and positive aspects of being gay. They said, "Don't hide it, come out." So, I did, and I've never had that scared gut feeling of being caught again.

Kus: It took you several years to get over the guilt?

Lonny: Yeah, somewhere in the neighborhood of 10-13 years.

Sr. Theresa:

Kus: As a religious person, people who have a lot of guilt, I'm sure, come to you. (Sr.T: yes) How would you deal with the kid who came to you and is just loaded with all kinds of guilt because of homosexuality?

Sr. T: Well, let me think about that for a minute. First of all, guilt to me is something that is very non-productive, regardless of what its origins are. Yet, to cure one of guilt, it's essential to know the origins. So, I would ask the person why do they feel guilty, and you know, are they guilty because they are a deeply religious person and feel that somehow their orientation is incompatible with God's love, their participation in the church rituals, in my case, you know, the sacraments and things like that. Do they feel guilty because it's going to hurt others, like their parents or friends, you know a social kind of pressure? Do they feel guilty because they're not living up to their own expectations? So, to me, finding the source of the guilt is essential and

Sr. Theresa cont:

then dealing with that source. If it's a healthy individual, who's having a crisis of an orientation, and wants to come to terms with it, I can deal with that level by giving them adequate information, giving them new things to consider, new ways of looking at things, especially if it's religious, I can give them new ways of looking at scripture. I can give them a better understanding of what's really being said. I can give them information on the way the church itself is developing its own concepts. If the person is not healthy, and this I would pick up just from discussion, if they were not a healthy productive person in their life, I would send them to a good counselor. I wouldn't even touch it. Because, you know, psychosis is not my line. And in one hour or less of talking, I could pretty much discern if this person had some really deep-seated problems, and where that guilt is coming from.

VII. NOT WANTING TO BE GAY

In the stage of identification, because the individual may hold negative preconceived notions of what gays are like and be experiencing guilt feelings, many gays report that they didn't want to be gay. In this section, we look at some of the more common reasons given by person who didn't want to be gay. These include desire for a family, peer support, personal acceptance, guilt, occupational hassels, being straight would be easier. We also look at not wanting to be gay as a "fleeting thought", because not wanting to be gay can linger on into other stages of the coming out process.

A. Wanting a family.

Persons recognizing their gay identity have the same unlimited choices of sexual lifestyles as straights. They may choose a life of celibacy in which they engage in sex with no one. They may choose to enter a male-

female marriage. Or they may choose to express their sexuality naturally with members of the same sex.

But, for many gays today, a commitment to a male-female marriage is living a lie, an act destructive to one's core integrity, and unnatural. As a result, many gays choose not to have an opposite-sex spouse nor children. This can lead to wistful feelings once in a while as seen in these accounts.

Tony:

Kus: Going though life, do you ever wish you weren't gay?

Tony: I think now and then all of us feel that way because of all the pressures that we have on us. The worst thing that hits me is that I can't have a son or a daughter, children. But now they're coming out with some gays being able to adopt children. I really love children, so that's the only thing that being gay has bothered me - not having children or having them around.

Kus: Would you be straight, do you think, if you had a choice?

Tony: I don't think if I had the choice I would be straight. I don't feel that it's up to me. I feel that this is the way God made me. Some people would disagree with me and some would agree, but I don't think I have the choice. I think my life's planned the way God wants it to be. I can vary from it a little bit, but the basic structure's there.

Cliff:

Kus: Do you ever wish you were straight?

Cliff: No. I did many years ago. I envied friends that had a family, but not anymore though, not at all. Those friends that had families are all divorced or have all the problems that come up with family. I'm very satisfied.

Trent:

Kus: If you had a choice, would you prefer not being gay?

Trent: Oh, from time to time, for a few minutes, I think I'd prefer not being gay. I get these feelings when life gets to be a hassle.

Trent cont:

Kus: Can you give me some examples?

Trent: I would like a family. That would be a good and satisfying experience for me. And so I would like to be, not necessarily not homosexual, but more heterosexual in...a little more selective about my own sexuality at times. But my life doesn't seem empty without it, it's not essential. That's the only situation I can think of, that I feel that way.

B. Peer support.

The desire for peer acceptance is a most powerful force in the individual's life. This is especially true for the teenager. And because most gays enter the stage of identification in teen years, this is a factor in not wanting to be gay. As the individual matures, however, this kind of peer approval need lessens. The adult learns that one can choose from an unlimited source of people to make a new peer group, for example, from one's church, occupation, political groups, hobby groups, etc.

Fabian:

If my fraternity brothers rejected me because they found out I was gay, it would just kill me. It would kill me! I don't know why that...they would reject me, but they might. That's one of the main reasons I wish I weren't gay. I guess it's the peer aspect of it.

Vincent:

Kus: Did you ever want to be a straight person?

Vincent: Yeah. I guess that I thought about that when in high school, when feelings are strongest that you want to be socially acceptable. You had to be "in the main stream" as far as your peers are concerned. It became much less of an issue in college. It was more frustration then. But during high school I used to think, "I wish I were" just

Vincent cont:

from the standpoint of making it easier on myself to deal with my own feelings.

Lance:

Kus: Today, now that you're happier than you've ever been before, do you ever feel that it would be easier not to be gay? Or do you ever wish you were not gay?

Lance: Well, that's a hard question to answer. Sometimes I wish I was non-gay, you know, because I really envy sometimes people that aren't gay. Because, I like...I like my lifestyle, I like to do a lot of things that aren't really associated with normal gay.

Kus: For example?

Lance: Hanging out with the boys and playing pool and working on cars. I like to do things like that. But the stereotype of gays is that you're not suppose to do things like that and it seems like when you hang around with people that do things like that, when they find out that you are gay, you're excised from the whole group. Maybe it's kinda a male ego trip, I don't know. Maybe they feel threatened. It's not like you're going to make sexual advances towards them at all, I never have. Most of my friends are straight. I have more straight friends than I do gay friends. Maybe it's a male ego trip, I don't know. They just feel threatened if one of their friends is gay, and they feel to use a metaphor, "butched" around with, and I don't know why that is. It's not like you're going to rape anyone at the first opportunity, you're just not sexually interested in them at all. Maybe they think you should be sexually interested in them and if you're not their feelings are hurt! (Laughs) They're going gee, he's not sexually interested in me!

Skip:

Kus: Do you wish you were straight?

Skip: (long pause) Well, yes, I do. But I think it's mostly to please the other world, or the other crowd, and I would have no problem. I've had sex with females within the past year. I don't really think it would be that hard to live with a female. I could, you know, as a cover. I'm sure there would be no problem. To wish I were straight, I do just to please the other crowd, but other than that, I could be married and still possibly have sex with males also, and sex with a female.

C. Straight might be easier.

The grass often looks greener in the other guy's pasture. She or he doesn't have the problems I do, one imagines. This seems a universal human reaction especially in tough periods in one's life. And even after the gay person accepts self as gay and is happy with that, s-he may imagine that things would be easier as a straight as we see in Paris' account.

Paris:

Kus: Do you ever wish you weren't gay?

Paris: No - maybe once in awhile. Not so much now, but once in a while about a year ago probably. I was going through some pretty difficult times emotionally and kind of sitting back feeling sorry for myself. And I was thinking at that time, God, if only you weren't gay. You'd be sitting at home, being happily married, and everything would be coming up roses. But, at the same time, that kind of thinking takes just a brief passage through my thoughts, and then I start thinking about all the other things I would have missed. And then the question takes a back seat to the positive experiences.

Kus: So, now you're happy that you're gay?

Paris: Very much!

D. Personal acceptance.

In Marty's account which follows, we see that being gay means re-adjusting one's thinking to include a sense of loss of the good things of one's past life, and not wanting to be gay may also be the result of difficulty accepting self as gay. To get at this type of data, I often asked persons if they ever cried because they are gay.

Kus: Did you every cry because you were gay?

Marty: Yeah. Mostly in thinking about my family...and a few times recently even! (chuckles) I think the part about being gay that's been hardest for me has been in the realm of personal acceptance, just thinking of actually being outside what society considers the norm. Being an expressive person and dealing with all that, and sometimes when I realize all the shit I was going to have to go through, I cry. I also cried before I told my folks because I didn't want to hurt them.

Kus: Besides the family issue, what do you mean by "all the shit" you'd have to go through?

Marty: When I realized I was gay, I also came to the realization that I was of a minority status. And I also realized that I was going to be a person that a lot of people hated simply because I was gay. And I realized a lot of people wouldn't understand me, and that people would assume things about me like my sexuality to be heterosexual, and I would have to do something overt to make them aware I'm gay. Once you decide to come out, there's no turning back. It's very oppressive to me. I never realized, for example, how comfortable my background was until I came out. I grew up in an upper middle-class, white, Protestant background. It was a privileged position that I had to give up being gay.

E. Guilt.

Guilt, not surprising, is often the reason a person might entertain thoughts of not wanting to be gay. Rev. Eric struggled with this problem 25 years before accepting, in a positive light, self as gay.

Kus: So, with this fear you also had a great deal of guilt?

Eric: Yes.

Kus: How did you get over that guilt? Don't be afraid to talk now.

Eric: I think my first attempt to get over the guilt was when I returned to the church. That was in the sixties. I thought that that would save me and I would learn to be celibate. It wasn't working too well, and when I went into the ministry I thought well, at least there, you know, I could totally devote myself. I would pray. I think my first awareness of self-acceptance came through the hours and hours of prayer. I prayed

Rev. Eric cont:

hours and hours on end, desperately and deeply, God, please make me a heterosexual. Well, it didn't happen. And then I even went God, please take all sexual desires from me, just make me asexual. That did not happen at all. Finally, one day on the seminary grounds, I was walking along and I was really depressed, and desperate, and finally I was very angry with God. I just told God, well, I am what I am, you created me and if that's unacceptable then I'm damned and there isn't one thing I can do about it. And I think that was the beginning of my acceptance of my homosexuality. Because I felt I had made an honest attempt through prayer to find some change in my life, and there was none. And yet I refused to believe, and of course I still don't that God did not hear me. So, I finally just...God, either accept me as I am, cause that's all I have to offer, or I'm damned out of hand. And Calvin and predestination, and Augustine and all that sort of thing is correct. Which I cannot buy. So that was the beginning but it has been a long, long hard struggle since that time.

F. Occupational hassles.

Not wanting to be gay often revolves around the notion that it could interfere with one's career goals and advancement. This is seen very clearly in Donovan's account. We see that in spite of living in one of the American cities which grant civil rights to gays, he's still afraid.

Kus: Do you accept yourself as being gay?

Donovan: No, I don't. I did but now that I'm getting older and more concerned with my career I've become less accepting of it and the consequences it might have on other things that I really want.

Kus: Would you elaborate?

Donovan: Well, right now, I'm doing very well at my job and it's so promising that it would be ridiculous for me to do anything else. I enjoy what I'm doing, I find it very pleasurable and to think of losing that because I was gay, just doesn't seem worth it to me. It just doesn't balance out. I would much rather be happy with my career and be content with the job, my vocation, than lose all that just because I was living with a man. I think as a matter of fact, I seriously considered that maybe later on I will get married to a woman and have a family.

Donovan cont:

Just for the security it offers. Even now I have trouble going to bars and things like that because I feel like I'm somehow putting everything else in jeopardy.

Kus: What about living in Seattle? Where your job is protected because you're gay? Does that make a difference?

Donovan: Yes, it does because even though your job is protected I think you can be held back and just wouldn't be promoted as quickly. Because right now our banking manager is gay and there's another person who works there who isn't gay, exactly the same age, and exactly the same qualifications. And right now, the one who isn't gay is a vice-president and, he's a loan officer, and the bank manager is an assistant vice-president and just doesn't have as much...just doesn't wield as much power. Just by seeing that, I'm sure there's a number of fields where a person could be gay but I don't know if I'd be attracted to them.

G. Fleeting thoughts.

Even after the individual is "out" and accepting, s-he may have fleeting thoughts about not wanting to be gay. Usually these thoughts occur as a direct result of a particular social occasion (for example, a straight party) or as the result of a particular happening (for example, reading about anti-gay rhetoric made by bigots at a rally).

I think every once in a while that it would be so much better being straight; you wouldn't have to hassle with all of this shit. Every once in awhile, you might come to a hurdle, and on your way over, you might stub your toe, and it's at these points you say, "It would be a lot easier being straight." Not the way I feel now; I don't really think I would want to be straight. I couldn't be truthful to myself. I think that, well, there's no way I could picture myself as straight anymore.
(Monty)

VIII. SPECIAL PROBLEMS

The stage of identification can lead to many health problems for the individual if s-he experiences overwhelming, destructive guilt or negative

preconceived notions about what gays are like. These special problems are often quite serious and indeed can be fatal as in suicide and alcoholism.

The Dedication in SAPPHO WAS A RIGHT-ON WOMAN reads:

To those who have suffered for their sexual preference, most especially to Sandy, who committed suicide, to Cam, who died of alcoholism, and to Lydia, who was murdered; and to all who are working to create a future for Lesbians.

(Abbott and Love, 1972, p. 5)

In this section, then, I look at four of the major health problems seen in this stage: "sexual orientation disturbance"; depression and suicide; alcoholism; and stress. I also briefly mention a few other possible health problems which can occur.

A. "Sexual orientation disturbance".

In the mid-1970's, when the American Psychiatric Association voted to remove "homosexuality" from their "sick list," and thereby "curing" 20,000,000 American gays at one crack on one day, they felt the need to replace it with a category of "sexual orientation disturbance." This category, also known as "ego-dystonic homosexuality," simply means that there are gay persons in the first stage of the coming out process who, beset with guilt and fears, and negative preconceived notions, don't want to be gay.

This particular disturbance is often quite dramatic both in its "crazy making" manifestations as well as in its dramatic "cure" when the person says "I am gay" and accepts this as positive.

One night a few years ago, I came on duty to my psychiatric unit and overheard some of my colleagues talking about one of our young men

patients. From the sounds of the story, I figured out that this person was in an acute psychotic episode (A.P.E.) as a result of identifying self as gay; this is also known as "homosexual panic." So, I conducted a mini seminar on the subject, and I indicated that if this person should say he was gay, and if the reactions on the part of the staff were very positive and indicated "okayness," this young man's auditory and visual hallucinations (hearing and seeing things not there) would likely disappear instantly. A few nights later, one of the mental health specialists came up to me as soon as I walked onto the unit, and he was beaming. "Bob, you were right! He admitted he was gay and his craziness just totally disappeared!"

The following is a story of one young man's depression over being gay that was so strong, he began having highly unusual and unrational desires to "pick off people" with a gun willy nilly.

The story of Lance:

Kus: During the times of depression that you felt, did you ever feel suicidal?

Lance: Oh, yeah. I attempted suicide once. Only thing I can remember about it, I was in high school at the time, and I don't really know what triggered it or anything like that, it's kinda a blur to me now. But I remember I came home from school and I just went straight to the bathroom, whipped open the medicine cabinet and started taking anything in there. I took, I did it slowly, I took two of these every half hour. Anyway, to make a long story short, I ended up in the hospital that night, totally out of my mind. I don't remember much of it. They didn't really do anything, what could they do, they didn't pump my stomach or anything, I do remember the next day the psychiatrist came around. I don't remember the exact questions he asked me but I remember one thing, I don't like the man. Cause he was...maybe it was an intentional gimmick, I only had a couple psych classes in college, but he was very rude to me, and told me what the hell was I trying to do. I never spoke to him, I just turned over in my bed and never said a word to him. I just didn't identify with him. I think the right person would have been kind or a psychiatrist that really knew

Lance cont:

how to handle the problem, would have been better help, but this man wasn't. I think he should have taken his PhD and gone back to school. As a psychiatrist I wouldn't pay him 5¢ let alone \$50. No way!

Kus: What kind of professional help did help you?

Lance: I was in college, in the psych program at the U. of Idaho. They had free professional counseling. I went there for about six months. One time I was going through a pretty great stage of depression. I was being almost manic-depressive. I couldn't sleep at night, I was really on the verge of going out of it. I just couldn't take it anymore. I knew if I didn't seek professional help then it might be too late later. And I'm really not one to be hyperchondric anyway. (Laughs) I just needed it then. And the woman that helped me, she was a psychiatrist, and she really helped me a lot. But I've had a lot of suicidal thoughts. Like I mentioned before, when I did seek professional help in college, that's one of the reasons that I did seek professional help because I was getting very suicidal and I was worried about it. That's the main reason. I was having very violent daydreams, suicidal, I was getting very violent in my tendencies with other people. I didn't want to turn other people off so I just knew it was time to seek professional help before...I don't know if I would have acted on my suicidal tendencies, but I knew it was time I seek help before I did act on them. So, I did.

Kus: Explain to me about this feeling violent towards other people.

Lance: OK. I remember...I don't...my memory must be bad...I remember I lived in this dorm and had a room all to myself and it looked out over the football field. I used to have a really...this is going to sound wierd...I don't think I ever would have acted on it...but it was a fantasy kinda...sometimes I use to think "if I had a gun, I could sit here in my room and pick off people on the football field." Just kinda pick them off, it would be a easy shot from here. And I thought...that's one of the reasons I thought Jesus, what are you thinking about, you know. I'm not a violent person, I've never beat up anyone or anything like that. I usually give quite a bit of thought to suicidal thoughts. The odd things. Guns were readily accessible to me. But luckily I didn't react on them.

Kus: Lance, when you accepted being gay as a positive thing, did all these kinds of feelings go away? All these kinds of thoughts?

Lance: Violent thoughts and suicidal thoughts? I think so. I'm much

Lance cont:

more happier now then I've ever been. My life is getting in shape. I really don't have any violent thoughts towards people. Not like I use to have anyway. No great homicidal fantasy. The psychiatrist I saw was really good, and she really helped me, she understood. So, I really say she earned her PhD. She was just fantastic. In fact, I send her Christmas cards. As far as any violent or suicidal thought go now, I would say no more than the ratio for a lot of persons. I think this is a personal opinion, I think everyone has suicidal thoughts, maybe consciously or sub-consciously. Everyone always blurts out once in awhile, I wish I were dead, or I want to kill myself. I think it has some kind of meaning, but as far as taking it seriously, like I was then, no.

The next story is perhaps one of the most fascinating slices of data I uncovered in my research. It's a portrait of how overwhelming guilt and non-acceptance of one's identity can lead to paranoid ideation and other psychotic thoughts.

Donovan's story:

Kus: When you first said you were gay, did that pose a problem to you?

Donovan: When I was 19, I had two same-sex experiences with men, and they were miserable experiences. So, I thought I wasn't gay. Then at 21, I fell madly in love with a man. I had pretended I wasn't gay, but things just built up.

Kus: What things built up?

Donovan: Well, at 21 I fell in love with this man, and I always wanted to go to bed with him. I always wanted to have sex with him. And I never did because I just couldn't bring myself to admit I did. And I think it's because I was just getting ready to bring myself to this man, that I learned I was gay.

Kus: When you came to realize you were gay, did it cause any problems with your head?

Donovan: No, not really.

Kus: You never felt guilt?

Donovan cont:

Donovan: Not when I finally admitted it to myself. Before then, I felt guilt about being turned on by a man's body. Once I finally admitted it to myself, the guilt disappeared.

Kus: Before you admitted it to yourself, there was guilt. What happened before this time to make you feel the guilt?

Donovan: Well, I was just so aroused by this one person. And it just became very neurotic too. Actually, I began imagining a lot of things, things happening that maybe really weren't happening at all. I would dream about him, and I used to think he was somehow controlling me by occult means perhaps. Once I was able to realize that I was actually gay and had a gay relation, most of that just disappeared. The struggle in my head was between having gay feelings and not wanting to admit I was gay.

Kus: You say you had dreams? And that he was controlling your head? Go beyond that, would you?

Donovan: Okay. I thought that this person was somehow a supernatural force, and that he was actually constantly with me even when he wasn't there. And I thought he was somehow trying to control my mind and keep me under control. I was just entirely infatuated with him. I couldn't understand why he was forcing himself on me in unnatural ways. It was as if he were trying to take over my body, and I thought all his friends were witches and things like that. I was afraid to go to bed at night, because I was afraid he would come into the room, that his natural body would enter the room and start programming my mind to love him even more. I was sure there was some kind of conspiracy against me, and I was afraid for my very life. I thought he was going to kill me and somehow keep my body alive. It was horrible. I was having hallucinations. I'd imagine seeing him enter my room at the dorm, hug me, and have conversations with me, and I was in some other world. This man was straight. When I was able to have healthy gay relationships, and when I realized I was gay, I was able to put this straight man out of my thoughts. Then, all of these mind trips disappeared. I tried to see if I could get back into that head space, but it just doesn't work. So, obviously it was just the contorsions that my emotional state was going through at that time.

Kus: And you're telling the truth?

Donovan: Yes. Right now? Yes.

Kus: Does that ever bother you that your mind went through such a stage?

Donovan cont:

Donovan: No. I think it was really good. I now see it as a different type of reality. I don't see it as any different than what I'm living now, but it was more dream-like. Actually, sometimes I wish I could get back to it...

Kus: Why do you wish you could get back to it?

Donovan: Because in a way it seemed very safe. At the time, though, it seemed incredibly unsafe. I guess I'm an escapist. There was so much more energy there, and so much more electricity in the air, and that's all gone now. I just feel I'm living a normal life. I just feel incredibly conventional. There isn't that awe anymore. Maybe that's also a sign of age.

Kus: Can you describe this "electricity" in the air?

Donovan: Well, whenever this person was around, there was a certain charge, and I could feel it. What was amazing was that I could be sitting there just thinking, and this person could reply, and he was able to actually answer my questions that I was thinking but not saying aloud. There were times when I would be by myself and imagine him coming into the room and having a conversation with him. Then, it seemed like when I'd see him, he'd be able to relate the conversation back to me. It was much more of a mystical than anything I've experienced since then. One of the reasons, I suppose, is that my lover (Marty) is so realistic and down to earth.

Dr. Luke, who works primarily with gay persons on a "wellness" level, as opposed to psychiatrists who work on "sickness," admits that he sees very little A.P.Es. However, he does offer some points on this process.

Dr. Luke:

Kus: Can you say a few words on the acute psychotic episode some gays experience in identification?

Dr. Luke: Well...ok, here's where I, my stuff as a psychiatrist comes in. I would try every way that I could to allay the fears, first to get them out of that panic state. To let them talk, to maybe put them in a secure place, maybe even to give them drugs, and then to elevate the situation and hear them talk. And if they are, I would hope most of the times they could come to grips with their homosexual feelings. And begin to meet other gay people, and develop a more accepting attitude about themselves. And also, to maybe become involved in a supportive gay subculture. I would hope that would be the outcome.

Dr. Luke cont:

Kus: So, homosexual panic is something only occurs in gay oriented people?

Dr. Luke: That's a real important point because it can occur, in my experience, also in paranoid schizophrenics, who have tremendously low self esteem, and who get the notion they must be something terrible, like a homosexual. And then of course, when you talk these people down, from their psychotic episode, and give them drugs and their psychosis disappears, of course it becomes more apparent they indeed are straight, in their sexual orientation.

B. Depression and suicide.

In the state of identification, and after the individual begins positive gay reading to rid self of guilt and preconceived notions, s-he often experience periods of self-hatred or self-loathing. One's self-esteem (What am I worth?) is said to be low.

Depression, as a definitive clinical entity, is not synonymous with the everyday feelings we all experience called "feeling blue," being "down in the dumps," or being "not up to par." Rather, depression is a condition characterized by clusters of criteria. Definite depression is a cluster of at least five of the following criteria, while the presence of at least four of the following criteria indicate "probable" depression.

1. Poor appetite or weight loss of two pounds in one week, or 10 pounds or more in one year without dieting
 2. Sleep disorder, such as insomnia (inability to sleep) or hypersomnia (sleeping all the time)
 3. Loss of energy, as noted by fatigability or tiredness
 4. Agitation or retardation
 5. Loss of interest in usual activities or decrease in sexual drive
 6. Feelings of self-reproach or guilt, sometimes of delusional proportions
 7. Complaint of or actual diminished ability to think or concentrate, as shown by slow thinking or mixed-up thoughts
 8. Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, including thoughts of wishing to be dead.
- (Freedman, et. al., 1976, p. 504)

Depression may be either short term or lifelong. One young woman, who was straight, said, "you know, Bob, there's not even one day in my entire life that I can even remember not being depressed." [She ended her depression by jumping from a bridge.]

Depression may be situational (as in grief reactions, learning one is gay, etc.) or may be organic (as seen in infants suffering from depression or in manic-depressive illness - M.D.I.).

The most extreme reaction to, or manifestation of, depression is suicide.

To judge by the letters I have received and by friends' reports, Victor's years-long contemplation of suicide is typical of many homosexuals who discovered their sexual identity in the forties and fifties. I know that during my college years, whenever I heard that someone had committed suicide, my first thought was: I wonder if he was homosexual. (Brown, 1976, p. 41)

Jay and Young report that their question "Have you ever contemplated suicide?" received a 40% "yes" from gay men and 39% "yes" from the lesbians (1977, 1979). Should these research statistics fairly accurately reflect reality, and if we take 40% of 20,000,000 gay Americans, we're now talking about 8,000,000 gay Americans who at some point in their lives had suicidal ideation. No small number indeed!

Before providing slices of data indicating this depression-suicidal thought cycle seen in the stage of identification, though, it must be pointed out that (1) some gays don't experience guilt or very little, and (2) many gays don't experience the special problems or pitfalls inherent in this stage of coming out. In response to my question, "Have you ever thought of suicide," for example, informant Cliff replied, "No. I was afraid I'd miss something."

Rev. Eric:

Kus: Along with the time and the guilt and fear of exposure, did you go through periods of depression?

Eric: Extreme.

Kus: Could you describe that depression?

Eric: I felt I was evil. I felt I was not good, that I was dirty. And I had lots of reminders about this. Our whole society continually reminded me. You know, if they ever found out. People liked me and thought I was very nice. And I thought, what if they knew that I like to suck cock? And I liked to be fucked, this type of thing. What if they knew that I liked to kiss other men, and why, you know, those things pried on my mind just something terrible. When I was young, of course the oppression was so extreme, and you know, it was not uncommon to hear of this person or that person committing suicide or attempting it. It was not uncommon to have friends who were arrested and sent to prison. I had a very good Navy friend, in fact, he taught me how to kiss, his name was John. He got caught while he was in the Navy and he was given twenty years of hard labor. We heard this again and again and again. We either knew through friends of ours or we heard about it through other people. Of course for some gay people it did occur. But there was this continual sense of being evil and damned. We were an abomination. I can't stress that enough.

Kus: Did you ever contemplate suicide?

Eric: Many times!

Kus: Did you every try suicide?

Eric: Yes, I did. I think they were fairly half-hearted attempts. But yeah, I did. I think perhaps one of the biggest things, the attempts to be at peace with muself was the many many years I abused alcohol. Tremendously. Fortunately for me I didn't become an alcoholic. I was what the AA call a heavy drinker. I certainly abused it tremendously but I never became addicted to it. But like many gay people I drank too much and frequently.

Kus: Dr. Brown, in his book Hidden Faces...Familiar Faces, Hidden Lives, made a statement that whenever he heard of a young person committing suicide his first thought I wonder if they're gay. Do you have that same kind of a feeling?

Eric: Very much.

Cimarron:

Kus: Did you ever consider suicide?

Cimarron: When I was living at home, yes. Because I just knew I was not going to be the macho construction type. It just held no interest in me, for me. And the circle of friends that I had were interested in logging or some sort of manual dexterity type job. And I had no interest in those. My sister and brother in law and I went out one night and they had a new convertible and we went out and came back about two o'clock in the morning. We'd been to one of the local clubs to dance up there. And while fooling around, supposedly, I got out on the trunk lid of the car - 70 miles an hour type of thing and thought at the time, that it would just be better if I jumped off the back end of it. I was very depressed and I was very, very happy to get away to school and away from home. They're lovely people, but we have so little in common that my nerves are on edge whenever I'm around my family. I don't know.

Skip: _____

Kus: Have you ever been depressed because you're gay?

Skip: I'm sure I have but I don't remember when.

Kus: Have you ever felt suicidal?

Skip: Because I was gay? No, I don't think so. I may have, but I don't think it was directly caused by being gay, but I have thought about committing suicide. I think it's because I didn't really understand what was going on in my life, I was lonesome or what I needed. I had never, you know, gone beyond thinking about suicide. Some people go so far as to put a gun to their head and think about pulling the trigger, or fixing a glass of poison and think about drinking it. I assume that is a chicken way out. Maybe it goes back to my being a man syndrome, but suicide is not the way out for me.

C. Alcoholism.

In February, 1980, I attended a two-day workshop on alcoholism at Harborview Medical Center for registered nurses. It was pointed out by Lori Dwinell, MSW, that alcoholism among gays is estimated at 25% for gay men and 25-30% for gay women. If we simply take 25% as a base rate,

multiply this by 20,000,000, we come up with 5,000,000 gay alcoholic Americans!

Alcoholism is a chronic, incurable disease which, if not arrested through abstinence, is terminal. Symptoms of this disease include black outs (not remembering things when seemingly being totally functional to others), overreactioning to symbols (words, stimuli), severe guilt and low self-esteem, etc.

It has been hypothesized in much gay studies literature that the high gay alcoholism rate is due to the fact that the gay bar has traditionally been the only major visible institution where gays could easily meet other gays and socialize in a relaxed atmosphere.

But as knowledge about coming out increases, especially knowledge about the stage of identification, and as our knowledge of alcoholism is widened, it becomes harder and harder to "blame" taverns for alcoholism. Bars don't cause alcoholism. Alcohol doesn't cause alcoholism. Drinking patterns of the individual, coupled with certain genetic programming, produce alcoholism.¹

Alcoholism is especially devastating for the gay person. While beginning alcoholic drinking to "douse guilt" may make one forget one's troubles temporarily, alcoholism in itself produces feelings of self-loathing, guilt, and depression. Thus, the problems are, in reality, doubled. Also, because alcoholism is life long, the individual suffering

¹I am indebted here to the staff of the Alcohol Treatment Program of St. Cabrini Hospital, Seattle.

from it will have it even if she or he progresses to a stage of self-acceptance of being gay. Finally, depression and suicidal thoughts are often exacerbated with alcohol use or abuse, a fact I've noticed over and over again; virtually all suicide gestures I evaluate in the emergency room are A.O.B. (alcohol on breath).

In this study, I didn't pry into alcoholism histories. However, I can say that alcohol abuse was common to several of my informants. As one alcohol specialist said, "It is tragic that gays will die as a consequence of the social stigma of alcoholism in the midst of gay liberation" (Niebold, n.d., p. 1).¹

Dr. Luke:

Kus: Luke, I've seen among many of the people, the state where a person labels themself gay, which could be maybe at 17 or 18 and/or some people, especially in my age category around 35, taking several years, like ten or fifteen years later to finally come to a state of accepting the matter as a positive thing. Now, I've also noticed in the gay community, lots of alcohol abuse. And I'm wondering, do you think this is from people caught in that time gap there, where they know they're gay but they don't accept it as a positive thing, or what?

Dr. Luke: The alcoholism, oh, yes, I don't think it's from the basic

¹After years of neglect, both the alcoholism community and the gay community are beginning to study and treat the special phenomenon of the gay alcoholic. Some recent gay alcoholism brochures include: SOBER, CLEAN AND GAY! and THE GAY DRINKING PROBLEM: THERE IS A SOLUTION, both by John Michael (CompCare, n.d.); 2 Alcoholics Anonymous publications, THE GAY ALCOHOLIC: AA'S MESSAGE OF HOPE (n.d.) and DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT (1976). Articles include Deborah Diamond and Sharon Wilsneck. "Alcohol abuse among lesbians: A descriptive study" (1978), and Thomas Ziebold. "Alcoholism in the gay community" (Blade, n.d.). One can learn further developments in this field at gay A.A. meetings which are in larger cities, Alcoholics Together meetings, or by writing to the National Association of Gay Alcoholism Professionals, P.O. Box 376, Oakland, N.J. 07436.

defective personality, I think it's a way of handling that stress of not accepting yourself. And also we have, up until the past few years, only had one public institution, and that's the gay bar. And now that other public institutions and other alternative ways of meeting gay people, I think that should probably remove some of the opportunities to become alcoholic. I think it's a combination of poor self acceptance, poor societal acceptance and availability and opportunity in being the only public institutional meeting place--that was the gay bar. (Dr. Luke)

D. Stress.

Stress is a straining, a tautness, a pressure. Like guilt, stress may be either positive (eustress) or negative (distress). As a positive force, stress helps the writer meet deadlines, surgeons to concentrate totally to the body at hand, and the bus driver to be watching the road. When stress becomes overwhelming, however, it can take on a pervasive nature, like guilt, and lead to a not-so-pleasant existence.

The following accounts discuss this phenomenon. The reader is especially urged to examine the idea set forth by Tony that on top of every other life stress, gays have sexuality stress with which to deal.

Tony:

Kus: Have you ever been suicidal?

Tony: Yes. When I was in the Navy and I was in boot camp...no, this wasn't before I realized I was gay. I was engaged to a gal back East and I got a dear John letter with an engagement ring back in it. And I took an overdose of pills that I was taking at the time plus some other pills I'd got from another gay. But there's other times I've thought about it...I was on submarine duty, this was in the Navy, and I got claustrophobia. I had to go talk to him before I got discharged also, from the submarine, because I felt like everything was closing in on me. And this was also when I was having trouble with my parents when they first found out and all. So, there was that, and being gay, and worrying about everything it just kinda built up and...well, the walls may not have been coming in then but psychologically the walls were coming in and it seemed like

Tony cont:

my whole world was totally falling apart.

Lance:

Kus: How long have you been gay?

Lance: All my life.

Kus: At what age did you discover that you were gay?

Lance: Well, I think at the point that you discover you're gay would be an arguable point, I think that's a questionable date, I think my first really strong, where I really knew I was gay, was probably at puberty, 13, 14.

Kus: Now, at 13 or 14 you discovered you were gay. Will you talk about that?

Lance: Very bewildered. It was a constant pressure then. I don't think I was happy about that, I always knew I wasn't right. But I learned to cope with it at adolescence.

E. Other.

Special problems associated with the stage of identification can occur much later in the coming out process but have their origins in this stage. For example, alcoholism can lead to liver damage (hepatitis and cirrhosis), child abuse, brain damage, hypertension (high blood pressure), and a host of other problems. Likewise, stress can produce ulcers.

Venereal disease, a special problem in the second, third and fourth stages of coming out, is perhaps the greatest "other" problem in the gay world. It's the "gift that keeps on giving." In a clipping sent from a friend of mine from a Cleveland newspaper in June of 1980, a report on the incidence of VD in San Francisco was mentioned to illustrate the scope of this problem. The article pointed out that the incidence of infectious syphilis, is 11 times the national average in San Francisco, and that one

out of sixteen people in San Francisco are the victims of VD. One physician said, "As far as I'm concerned, San Francisco is not just the VD capital of the U.S. - it's the VD capital of the world!" (The gay population of San Francisco is estimated at 100,000 or more).

Rev. Eric:

Kus: John, is there anything you can think of that you'd like to say that we perhaps haven't covered that might deal with the coming out process in terms of your life or family?

Eric: Well, it wasn't easy for me, in the past, a number of times to "go straight" and it never worked. I went to whorehouses occasionally and I'd walk away from them saying I'm a man, I'm a man, you know. Of course that was a delusion that would only last for a very short time. My own process of coming out, the emotional process of coming out, was a very difficult thing. Even though when I first had a knowledgable experience, I knew that that was my world, I did not like it. I would say that my life hasn't been an easy one. I think along with many people in my generation, we are left with a really really deep resentment towards society and the courts, and that, because of what they've done to us. We have been damaged and we never, that will never heal, the scar tissue is too deep.

Kus: Also, from your vast experience in the gay world, would you say that alcohol abuse and suicidal gestures and depression are all part of the coping or non-coping kinds of things that deal with guilt?

Eric: They're all coping mechanisms, some quite destructive. I'll add another one, and that's sexual abuse or sexual misuse, I don't mean abuse but sexual misuse is another factor because there's a lot of sexual misuse in the gay world.

Kus: For example?

Eric: For example, the promiscuity. There's a lot of it. Even to the extent of things like glory holes and peep shows and this type of thing where it gets into the numbers game. In other words, how many people can I have sex with during a certain given time, and that. But I think that these are all coping mechanisms with a deep deep seated guilt. So, most of them are destructive. But I believe that the promiscuity, and the utter casualness of so many of the sexual encounters in the gay world, I think that needs to be included in the destructive coping mechanisms.

IX. GETTING READY FOR STAGE II

With identification or recognizing one's gay identity, there often comes a desire to check out the gay community in "the big city." It also leads to students doing term papers on homosexuality or the gay movement. In sum, it marks the end of the first stage and helps the individual enter the second or third stage of coming out.

Monty:

I think I realized that I was gay around senior in high school, when I was 18 years old. Before that, I had suspicions and then I confirmed it. I did a term paper on homosexuality and dug very deeply into it, and I was very interested in it and confirmed a lot of the feelings that I had. And I found out that there were a lot of people like myself in, for example, San Francisco. So after graduation from high school I left thinking that I was heading for San Francisco and ended up living in Seattle and found the gay subculture there.

Mike:

Kus: What happened in 1955?

Mike: I suddenly faced the fact that I was but didn't admit it to anybody, didn't do it. Just hid it. Got active in politics. Planned my coming out. It took four years (laughs) to plan it but it was all one plan.

Kus: Can you describe that?

Mike: Yeah. I...well, it's like an alcoholic who suddenly says I am an alcoholic. I suddenly said I am a homosexual, but I didn't admit it. And I read an article, about Tab Hunter in Hollywood, one of those magazines that are real dirt magazines. And there was a bunch of gay bars in Hollywood so I planned for four years my coming out in Hollywood. Saved money to do it. And did it.

Kus: How old were you in 1955?

Mike: 19.

Kus: So at 19 that's when you first realized that you were gay? How did you know that?

Mike: Well, suddenly you just say to yourself, you're running around

Mike cont:

with guys and chicks. But suddenly you say to yourself, hey, I like the guys better than I like the chicks, It just hit me. Excuse me, not everybody does it, it just hit.

SUMMARY

In this chapter we saw some of the hallmarks of recognizing one's gay identity. We saw examples of childhood memories, preconceived notions many gays have of what gays are like, some opposite-sex experiences, identifying self as gay, guilt, not wanting to be gay, special problems inherent in this stage, and getting ready to move on.

Having seen that recognizing gay identity is not always smooth sailing, we now move to slightly less choppy waters - the stage of cognitive change.

CHAPTER FIVE - THE CLOSET DOOR OPENS - COGNITIVE CHANGES

He recovered to level flight and was quiet for a time before he spoke. "Very well," he said, "who are you?"

"We're from your Flock, Jonathan. We are your brothers." The words were strong and calm. "We've come to take you higher, to take you home."

"Home I have none. Flock I have none. I am Outcast. And we fly now at the peak of the Great Mountain Wind. Beyond a few hundred feet, I can lift this old body no higher."

"But you can, Jonathan. For you have learned. One school is finished, and the time has come for another to begin."

As it had shined across him all his life, so understanding lighted that moment for Jonathan Seagull. They were right. He could fly higher, and it was time to go home.

He gave one last look across the sky, across the magnificent silver land where he had learned so much.

"I'm ready," he said at last.

And Jonathan Livingston Seagull rose with the two star-bright gulls to disappear into a perfect dark sky.

(Jonathan Livingston Seagull)

INTRODUCTION

The second stage of the coming out process is analogous to going to school. Having thoroughly learned what the straight world is like through parents, teachers, television, music, billboards, the works, the gay must now learn another reality, a gay reality.

This stage is, conceptually, the period from recognizing self as gay (identification) to accepting self as a gay in a positive light (acceptance). In actuality, though, some gays, especially younger ones living in progressive American urban areas, may be changing their notions about gays before realizing they're gay. Also, the learning of gay reality should be thought of as a lifelong happening. As Marty, who's been through the whole coming out process, says, "I think I'm still learning things about

being gay."

Coming out is gradual and ongoing. It encompasses not only the realization of one's homosexuality and consequent proclamation of friends, but also a long-term education. In this gay education, the pervasive American myths about homosexuality must be continually challenged. (Kyper, 1978, p. 392)

In this chapter we examine some of the common features of this stage. These include passing, why passing occurs, how to pass, where one passes, negative effects of passing for the individual and others, changing conceptions of what gays are really like, and opening the closet door by exploring gay reality.

I. THE CONCEPT OF PASSING

The gay studies theorist Jack Babuscio defines "passing" in this way:

Passing is generally defined in the metaphore of theatre, that is, playing a role: pretending to be something that one is not. In the context of homosexuality, however, the emphasis should be placed on concealment rather than pretense. Hence, to 'pass' is to camouflage one's gayness by withholding information about oneself that might lead others to identify one as homosexual. (1976, p. 40)

"Concealment," for example, refers to failing to tell others about a same-sex lover. "Pretense" refers to deliberately telling stories to make others believe something about self which simply isn't true, for example, telling others one has an opposite-sex spouse when one doesn't.

As we'll see throughout this chapter, both pretense and concealment are used by the gay person. However, to hide, or conceal, one's true identity is usually the motivation of pretense. Thus, we see Babuscio's logic.

Passing as straight isn't an "all or nothing" happening. Rather, it is something over which the gay person usually has total control and, as such, can be engaged in or not engaged in to different people, in different settings, at different times. One may choose, for example, to be "out" to

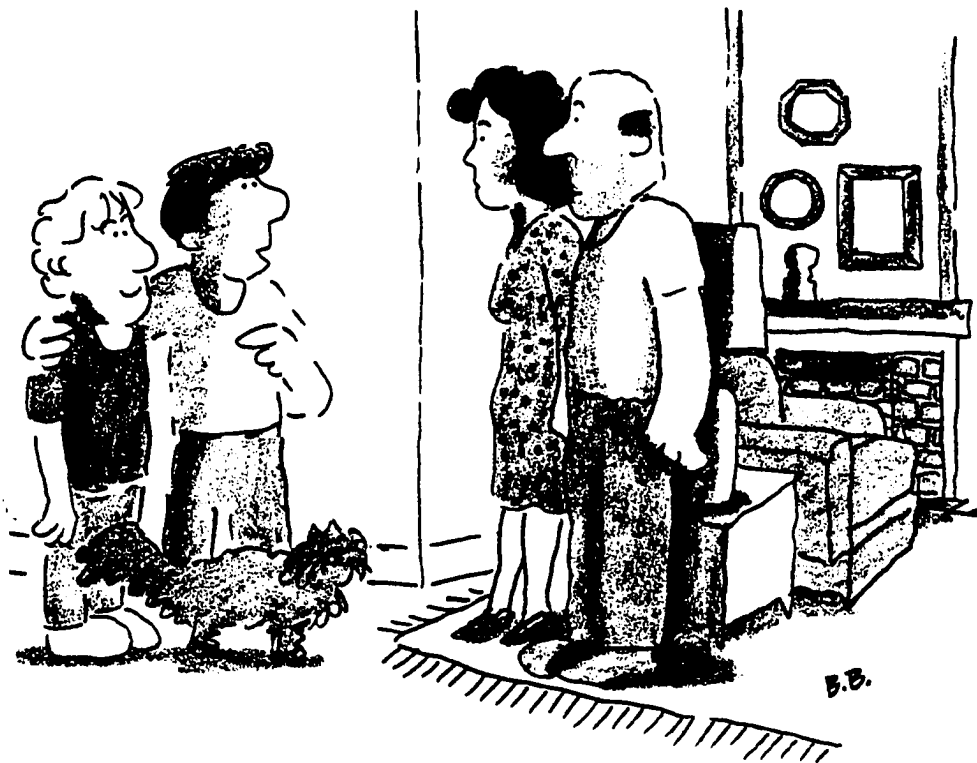
friends but "in" (the closet) by passing on the job. Further, although passing is an especially common feature of the second stage of coming out, it can last through life even if a person is in the fourth stage of coming out. For example, imagine a handsome young man who we'll call Paul. Paul is openly gay in all major areas of life, i.e., to his friends, family, church, and on the job. He's now on a vacation at the beach with his lover with whom he's going out to dinner in half an hour. He runs up the beach to a little mom and pop store to buy a pack of cigarettes. As he's leaving, the sweet little old lady who runs the store says, "Have a nice vacation. Don't get too tired out from all the pretty girls on the beach!" Chances are very, very good that Paul will smile and say "okay." He's not likely to say "I'm gay" or give an oration on gay liberation.

Passing has both positive and negative effects on the individual, others, and society at large. We already saw that on the societal level, passing as straight leads to invisibility which leads to discrimination. Positive effects on the individual will be alluded to in this chapter and developed more fully in Chapter 6. Negative effects on self and others will be discussed later in this chapter.

A. Types of passing.

What I call "types" of passing, Goffman calls a "cycle of" passing.

...The cycle (of passing) may start with unwitting passing that the passer never learns he is engaging in; move from there to unintended passing that the surprised passer learns about in mid-passage; from there to passing "for fun"; passing during non-routine parts of the social round, such as vacations and travel; passing during routine daily occasions, such as at work or in service establishments; finally, "disappearance" - complete passing over in all areas of life, the secret being known only to the passer himself. (Goffman, 1963, p. 79)



*"Mom and Dad, this is my new lover. He'r rather remain anonymous,
but for the purpose of identification, let's call him Tom."*

Because the concept of passing is most easily understood in the metaphor of theater, I use the language of the dramaturgical approach of symbolic interaction theory here. "Actor" refers to the individual, specifically the gay person. "Audience" refers to "others" with whom the actor interacts.

1. Unwitting passing.

Sometimes the gay individual is "passing as straight" without even trying. Such passing can be either actor-oriented unwitting passing or audience-oriented unwitting passing.

a.) Actor-oriented unwitting passing.

In actor-oriented unwitting passing, the individual engages in traditional straight behavior because s-he doesn't know s-he is a gay person. This type of passing occurs before one reaches the stage of identification, for example, as in gay children and teens and is pre-Stage I behavior.

Unlike the deliberate hiding kind of passing which is often tedious and paranoid-producing, this form of passing can be comfortable. Here are two examples.

Mark:

Kus: Did you ever date women even though you've never been attracted to them sexually?

Mark: My parents tried to put me into a dating cycle, that type of thing.

Kus: Did you do that?

Mark: Yeah. I did it high school, and particularly in summers when we would go out to our summer cabin, usually August. I had a steady girlfriend there, that was what all my peers did, and

Mark cont:

that never lead to any kind of sexual involvement.

Kus: Were you trying to pass as straight?

Mark: I was doing what all my friends were doing. I didn't have a label for it, but it was considered the thing that you did and just sorta went along with it, I was programmed (laughs) but there were no sexual interest in them [women]. It was a lot of fun, we'd go to square dances and that type of thing, it was a way of socializing.

Marty:

Kus: Did you ever try to mask your gay feelings before coming out?

Marty: From the period from 13 to 19 I did.

Kus: How did you do that?

Marty: Well, mostly by behavior. I was always one to have very strong relationships with women my age through that period of my life, through junior high and the first couple of years of college. I guess through those relationships was the only source of my sex life. I was just working so hard to be sexually turned on to women. Well, I don't know if I was working that hard. I kept any thoughts about my attractions towards men to myself, and it was sort of a fantasy type thing. I just put in a lot to my personal relationships with women. In fact, I thought about marrying a couple of the women that I got to know intimately.

Kus: Do you think you were passing as straight at the time?

Marty: Yeah. Definitely. No question about it.

Kus: Was it a comfortable state?

Marty: Yeah. I was comfortable because I didn't have a gay identity at the time. So, I didn't feel that was covering up anything. I didn't even realize that I was denying myself anything until I fell in love with a man. I really feel like once I recognized my gay characteristics, I was able to take hold of my life. I feel like I've had control of my life all the way, really. It's just overcoming the social teachings and becoming aware of myself that required work. Once I did that, once I associated myself with gayness, I feel I turned my life around fairly quickly as far as getting into the type of relationships I wanted with men.

b.) Audience-oriented unwitting passing.

In this type of passing, the actor knows his/her gay identity and doesn't mind sharing this knowledge with others. However, the audience doesn't pick up on what the gay actor is saying. Excellent examples of this are seen in Chapter 7 where we see gays practically hitting their families over the head with gay things and families not picking up the clues.

2. Stage passing.

As we saw in Chapter 4, many gays go through a period in their lives, before recognizing their gay identity, where they realize they're sexually attracted to members of their own sex yet think they're just "going through a stage." Thus, sexual feelings, as opposed to a yet-to-grasp identity, is what is concealed.

Kus: How did you cope?

Lance: Like most gay people you just pretend that you're not. You do all the things the male of the species is supposed to do. You go out with girls, have intercourse with girls; it's a male ego trip. But all the while you know, you're just kinda lying to yourself. You just always know that you're gay. You give yourself the story that you're just going through a stage, it will pass. But it never does. Most people think it does, but it doesn't.

3. Closet passing.

Closet passing is the form of passing which one usually thinks of when speaking about gays "passing as straight." Through concealment and pretense, one hopes to hide one's gay identity from the audience which is seen as potentially hostile if the true identity were known.

This type of passing occurs after the stage of identification and can be used or not used throughout life.

Should the individual use closet passing in totality, i.e., to hide gay identity from all people, at all times, and in all occasions, we say that "disappearance" is occurring. In actuality, however, it is quite difficult to imagine that the actor would or could disappear entirely through a whole lifetime unless s-he died at a very early age. Even a gay celibate Trappist monk would likely share this information with his spiritual advisor.

The notion of "disappearance" as a total hiding is not limited to sexual identity issues, but rather, total hiding is a very common phenomenon experienced by the average person. One may hide his or her "deep, dark secrets" even from those closest to self. Examples of this might include hiding from others one's kinkier sexual fantasies, petty jealousies, secret hopes of revenge, grandiose wishes for the future, fears, feelings of inferiority or shyness, etc.

But for our purposes, disappearance as a concept is not as important as is closet passing; if disappearance was accomplished, we would not be able to interview the informant about past closet passing. Therefore, I present an example of typical closet passing by Vincent who passed as straight during his college years.

Vincent's story:

Kus: Did you live in a fraternity house?

Vincent: Yes, I did.

Kus: Was that a source of frustration to see all the young men around you all the time and having no sex?

Vincent cont:

Vincent: Yeah. I think the total absence of sex with others during high school and college was a source of constant frustration.

Kus: Elaborate.

Vincent: It was mostly frustrating because I had had an active younger life. I knew how great sex and close relations with the same sex could be. Before college and fraternity, my sex was with others in meaningful relationships. But in college, and especially in a fraternity house, it was difficult. Mainly the difficulty comes from the fact that you're living around people so closely, for so long a period, day and night. And you have to project a certain image constantly. So, I withheld any display of my true feelings for fear that I could be made into a scapegoat. Well, I suppose I could have run away from it. I could have divorced myself from the fraternity as a whole, gotten an apartment, and maybe found someone to share with me their same sexual feelings. But at the time I was still very concerned about being accepted and being part of the mainstream of life. So, to satisfy the majority of the people, you just hide your true feelings. I felt that if I didn't, I would be in a minority and would experience hell. You must remember that a fraternity is much like a family, but you have to conform. If you don't, you either don't make it to full membership or you're held up to ridicule. So, this continued to add to my total confusion.

Kus: Tell me about your high school and college years.

Vince: Growing up through high school and junior high, you're in social situations in which the pressure is belonging to the group so to speak; this plays an important part in everyone's development. To realize you're different from the majority of your friends creates a problem. You have to be secretive as a result and play roles that you don't want to play. But, you're more or less forced to play these roles for social acceptance and to meet society's demands. So, I think it was particularly difficult for me during those years. I purposely hid my feelings. I didn't want anyone to know. I purposely avoided almost any sexual contact at all so that there would never be any question about it. I dated and played the role, the games, just to be so-called acceptable.

Kus: You dated women?

Vince: Yes.

Kus: So you were passing during high school and college? Passing as straight?

Vince: Yes.

Kus: Were you successful?

Vince: Yes. Very much so. At least from the standpoint of those who were in a position to observe. But I don't think I was totally successful from a partners' position, because I'm sure there were questions raised in the minds of the women I dated during my lifetime. I'm sure they must have wondered why I didn't come on as strong to them or project the same types of images that most people my age and sex were projecting at the time. For example, I never ever suggested having sex. It wasn't until later in life that a woman partner ever brought this to my attention.

4. Game passing.

Game passing is a passing "just for the hell of it" or as a game. It's amusing. It's not so serious and intense as closet passing. Thus, should the audience learn the actor's gay identity, it's just "no big deal" as Ethan would say.

This game of passing is intriguing in that it usually signals that one is ready to give up passing all together. But, before investing so much intensity and seriousness in closet passing or "passing for real," one often has a hard time stopping abruptly and suddenly hurling self into gay activism; closet passing is similar to running down a hill, while game passing is the level place one gets to at the end of the hill.

Kus: Did you ever pass as straight deliberately?

Trent: Oh, yeah. I still do, but before it was serious, and now

Trent cont.:

it's a game, you know. It's like anything else, you've got to live in the world. I am protective of myself. Passing as straight is simply letting people believe what they want to see. I don't tell people I'm straight. I don't make jokes about girls. I don't pass as straight in that regard. I don't whistle if I see a girl that I think is pretty, you know. And I'm learning to value that kind of attractiveness in beauty too. I acknowledge that, but I don't try to make people believe I'm heterosexual. If they assume that, that's their assumptions. I don't have any responsibility for that.

5. Straights passing as gay.

Strange as it may seem, I've uncovered several examples of straights passing as gay. One involved one of my best friends who, in a dance contest he was in, determined that one of the judges was gay. He began winning at the judge to influence his vote. Another example was a straight woman friend who found herself at a workshop on "female sensuality." Because all the other women were lesbians, she pretended she was also.

But perhaps the most glaring example of straights passing as gay are persons known as "political lesbians." These are women who, for various reasons based on certain feminist philosophies, call themselves "lesbian" even though their sexual orientation is straight.

B. Benign paranoia.

Before beginning the exploration of why people engage in passing as straight, and passing here will usually refer to "closet" passing, a word should be said about "benign paranoia."

The concept of paranoia usually conjurs up the notion of irrational" fears having no basis in reality. It also conjurs up the idea

that paranoid ideation is something pathological or harmful for the individual.

In gay terminology, however, "paranoia" often (but not always) refers to a healthy caution state in which one always is on the lookout for bigotry.

We gay people have had to develop a benign, self-protective alertness that can be viewed as a positive form of "paranoia." We must be aware of how other people are seeing us and reacting to us emotionally. It is necessary lest we be hit unexpectedly with a stroke of bigotry based on someone's suspicion of our Gayness. The Gay "paranoia" is benign because it acts only as an early warning system that helps us to make social adjustments that smooth social interactions.

The Gay Early Warning System is costly in energy, but it pays dividends. It provides plenty of practice in noticing words chosen, posture, voice intonation, and facial expression. In other words, it provides the experience that increases sensitivity.

(Clark, 1977, pp. 36-37)

One very important feature to note in the above definition of "benign paranoia" is the gay individual. What this means in terms of gay reality will be explored more fully in Chapter 6.

II. WHY PASS?

Having said that concealment and pretense are used to hide in closet passing, we're now faced with the question, "Why hide in the first place?"

In this chapter section I examine two major reasons to answer this question. These are: being alone and having fears. I then examine the actualities¹ which give rise to the fears.

¹I am indebted to Dr. Jon Driessen for the concept of "actualities." Actualities are concrete happenings. "Realities" are what one carries around in one's head about the actualities. This was developed by Driessen and presented in a paper "Society as narrative" and read at the 10th World Congress of Sociology, Uppsala, Sweden in August, 1978. See especially the section titled "Language and the brain."

A. Being alone.

In SOCIETY AND THE HEALTHY HOMOSEXUAL, Dr. Weinberg talks about a man from a small town who wrote regularly in his diary, "Dear God, please introduce me to another, to just one other homosexual person, like me." He waited five years before meeting an open gay person. (1972, p. 90)

Kus: Now, when you were 13 or 14 and figured out you were gay, what did you do about it?

Lance: Absolutely nothing. What could I do. Couldn't risk letting anyone know. I couldn't risk parental pressures or parental disgust actually. I just found a fantasy world.

The "being alone" which often occurs upon recognizing one's sexual orientation is one of the most awesome, powerful, and intense aspects of gay reality. It is this that separates gays from most other minorities. And it is because of this being alone that one becomes a stranger, a pretender, in the world. This has very important theoretical consequences as will be seen in our discussion of gay sensitivity, camp, and "seeing society clearer" that many gays report.

For now, however, we look at the two major reasons for "being alone:" the lack of anticipatory socialization and lack of visible gay support.

1. Lack of anticipatory socialization.

From the time one is a small child, s-he is taught how to be a straight adult. The child watches how mommy and daddy functions and how they're different. "When you grow up and get a wife (husband)..." is

heard by the child. Thus when the gay person all of a sudden learns s-he isn't straight, passing often occurs to prevent parents from being hurt and other reasons explored in Chapter 7.

This lack of anticipatory socialization sets the gay apart from every other minority. A black child, for example, is taught early on what it means to be a black adult in America. The gay has no such luck.

2. Lack of visible gays.

Although one can conceive of a gay person actually being the only gay in town...for a town with a population of, say, ten, it's much more likely that other gays are around but invisible through passing. As a result of no visible gays around, the gay may then pass thinking s-he is all alone.

A very interesting example of this was brought to light when my Gay American course was publicized across Montana in the media. I received a call from a man who had a sexual experience with a fellow sailor on one night in World War II. Since that time, he lived as a straight in a small Montana town. He came to my class to meet other gay persons, and his sense of happiness was overwhelming to see.

To sum, gays often pass as they think they're the only gay in their family and in their community.

B. Fears.

Besides the initial sense of being alone, closet passing is usually the result of having fears over what might happen to the individual should identity be known. Some of these fears are explored here.

1. Rejection.

Underlying most fears of disclosure is a sense that others will be rejecting. This is shown in the account of Fabian who was, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the most "closeted" of all my informants.

I think that if I came out now and got total rejection, it would kill me. It would really hurt me. But I think that if I work at it, I'll be able to understand a lot of people. Right now, I can't see why people wouldn't be able to accept me, but I guess everybody has their own reasons, their own fears, their own homophobia.
(Fabian)

2. Scary feelings.

Before one comes out in a disclosure sense, the idea of telling others is just downright scary. The actor has absolutely no idea how his or her audience will react. This sense of fright can permeate one's reality and lead to a rather uncomfortable state of living. It's this "scary feeling" which gives rise to the notion of paranoia.

I found coming out easier when I looked back on it, but before you do it, I would tell somebody that it's sort of a scary experience, because you don't know how people are going to react, whether you know them or not. You don't know their hidden feelings that well, and it's a very touchy situation on the person coming out. I think, because he really has to play it careful in who he tells and how he tells them. There were a few that I thought would just laugh at me, but they didn't. They just accepted it immediately, and they thought, well so what? He's still the same Terry I knew last week. (Terry)

And Skip:

Kus: When you discovered that you were gay, did you feel bad about it?

Skip: Yes, I felt very uncomfortable with it because I was afraid of what society would have to say. I was listening to my parents, all the people that were straight, and I had this in the back of my mind, of how other people thought of gays.

3. Job loss.

When people are given the Twenty Statements Test and asked to provide twenty statements following "I am a...", near the top of the list is one's occupational identity. One's life work is an important "identity peg."

Second, one's occupation is necessary to provide basic life needs such as food. In a tight job market, in a small town having only one or two places in which to be employed, or in highly specialized fields, job security becomes crucial.

The gay, then, often passes as straight to prevent job loss. Job loss would incur a double whammy for the gay: loss of money and a reduction of self-worth with job identity stripped away. We'll see an example of this later.

4. Family rejection.

In Chapter 7 we'll see that many gays don't disclose identity to their families as they fear rejection even when "out" in all other areas of life.

5. Other.

There is a host of fears listed for passing by people engaging in passing in addition to those listed above. The two examples that follow indicate some of these. Bob's account is especially intriguing in that it shows a sense of "pervasive calamity" which can lead to pervasive paranoia. Further, one wonders if Bob's notion of having "to be good at what you're doing" ties in with the "best little boy in the world" phenomenon.

Does it lead to superior behavior manifestations? This is explored briefly in the next chapter.

Bob:

I felt, and still do, that in order to be gay and make it, you have to be very smart. If you're not, you're going to be exploited, and you're going to be kicked in the face. You're going to be fired. All of these things are going to happen. So, in order to cope with that, you've got to be on top of things, you've got to know what's going on, you've got to be good at what you're doing. If you're not, you're not going to make it; you're going to be a failure.

Sr. Theresa:

Kus: Did you feel guilty?

Sr. T: No, I didn't feel wrong, I felt scared. But I was scared because of society, and, you know, what the label could do to me or what I felt it would do to me. But I didn't feel intrinsically evil.

Kus: What kind of fears did that conjure up?

Sr. T: The fear of losing my job. Fear of losing respect from people that were dear to me. The fear of just being labeled something that was a minority. And also, fear of stereotyping. It was at that time I really didn't have lesbian friends that I was aware of, and I hadn't, except for maybe the previous year. But I didn't have that much contact with lesbian culture, or gay men's culture. So, I was operating from the end row. Except what I read.

C. Actualities.

Do the fears which lead to passing have a basis in actuality. To examine this question, I look at some areas of discrimination in existence in 1980 America, provide some accounts of informants whose covers were blown to see what actually happens, discuss a very unusual potentially negative consequence of gay civil rights, and finally show some male-female differences.

1. The actuality.

In several studies illuminating actual discriminatory happenings against gays (Bell and Weinberg, 1978; Jay and Young, 1977, 1979; Weinberg and Williams, 1974), it would appear that discrimination in many areas of life such as being fired from a job, being thrown out of the military, being blackmailed, etc., is far less than one would image based on fear level.

However, there are certain special points to keep in mind when discussing the actuality of oppression.

First, for an individual convicted of homosexual sexual experience with a consenting adult or a person fired from a job, statistics are irrelevant. The individual is 100% convicted and 100% fired.

Second, laws and discriminatory patterns against gays do indeed lead to fear of discovery, guilt and shame, and the resultant special physical and emotional problems discussed in the previous chapter. This fear seems to be the greatest oppressor in this stage of coming out.

Third, discrimination against gays is more common in certain professions (for example police work, ministry, teaching), in certain groups (Mormons, fundamentalist Protestants), and in certain areas of the country (for example the South).

Specifically, instances of discrimination against gays (including gay celibates) are seen in being fired from jobs, not promoted within a job, denied security clearances, denied housing, denied professional licenses, denied service in restaurants, denied membership in churches, verbally harassed and threatened, blackmailed (a special problem of this stage of

coming out), denied citizenship, denied equal adoption rights, etc.

2. Stories involving covers being blown.

To show what happens when the fear of discovery gives way to actuality upon having one's cover being blown, I present two slices of data from my informants.

Tim:

Kus: OK, what are the risks that you're talking about?

Tim: Well, their job, their family, we're taking an for instance, without an individual, and then again, who knows that individual's aspects? Now, twenty years ago, I would never have thought about coming out of the closet publicly. Privately with my gay friends, yes, I was way, way out of the closet. So, you see, we have two aspects here. Then we also have a family aspect, as far as the family was concerned I was out of the closet. I was a no good s.o.b. Workwise, I was not out of the closet yet, it was something that happened later that brought it out. It worked out personally for me. Now, whether it would work out perfectly for someone else is another question. I will jump again about six years. Somebody who was in the same company and also a salesman, as both my lover and I were, saw us both go into a gay bar and called my boss in Chicago and told him about it. It took him a couple of months but eventually he mentioned it to us. I looked at him and said, yeah, and poor Larry just wentAnd I told Larry afterwards that there was just no reason to lie about it, and he said to us, why lie about it, tell the truth. Of course, we did. My boss's next question was "Well, are you gay?" And I said, "yes but I do my job and I do my work, and I don't throw it in anybody's face. So does it really make any difference." And he said, "Well, of course not, you're both excellent salesmen, you're making money for us, and that's all that matters." Whereupon the subject was dropped and was never discussed again until Larry's funeral and it was brought up and then dropped again. And I continued to work at that company for 22 years. So, I think we hit an individual basis here as to whether you should or should not come out and how you're coming out. If the circumstances for one person might be disastrous, here in my case it worked right, and maybe if it hadn't been handled properly could have been disastrous too. Who knows. I had a choice to make when my boss asked me, were you two guys going into the bar, and I decided why lie about it because the only thing I would do is get deeper and it would make

Tim cont:

the situation worse and I just said sure. I mean, if they want to play games, I'll play games too, there's the tiger in the den, fine, that's the way it is, if you don't like it, I'll find another job. But again, he was a good, understanding man. And he said, you're both good salesmen, you're not doing anything you shouldn't be doing, so do your job. Your personal life is your life.

Mark:

I had some difficulty with my boss. My boss, immediate boss, had some hangups about it. He persisted in trying to make an issue out of it within the hierarchy of the company up to as recently as last year, when he went back to the New York offices he raised the point with some of the senior vice presidents and was told point blank, that they didn't have time to talk about that. All the other media experiences save one, have never given me any difficulty. The one that gave me trouble was being on the cover of a local news magazine here. What I perceived that being, is that many people that you deal with don't really know who you are, in terms of your outside life. They look at the newspaper and if they see an article that has anything to do with homosexuals, it doesn't interest them so they pass over it. Or they don't get beyond the first paragraph. And they don't really see, sometimes, the people that are on the television tube. But being on the cover of a magazine and being displayed all over town for a whole week, it was kinda unavoidable. And as a consequence I had a strange reaction from some people in the business because they finally perceived that I was gay. For those who had trouble accepting that they would...I could perceive some distinct coolness. There's a major brokerage firm in this building and sometimes I'd get into the elevator and people would move over to the opposite corner, as far away as possible or avoid eye contact when the week before they'd say hello and good morning. That kind of thing went on for awhile and gradually dissolved.

3. The special case of civil rights.

Unlike racial minorities, gays traditionally haven't had problems getting jobs due to passing. The problem occurs if one's identity becomes known after hiring. Thus, the gay movement has never asked for "affirmative" action hiring policies as have Chicanos, blacks, women. Rather, civil rights laws in certain cities protect the gay from being fired or

not promoted simply on basis of sexual orientation. Likewise, in housing such laws prevent (theoretically) landlords from dropping gays on the basis of sexual orientation.

One very unusual unanticipated negative consequence of the laws - which exist in only a small minority of American cities, is that they often are repealed as in Eugene, Wichita and Miami. Thus, the closet gay who discloses identity on the job while civil rights are in effect, is then out on a limb when they are repealed.

4. Male-female differences.

In looking at the realities of oppression, one is forced to examine male-female differences.

There is very strong evidence that both the stigma and the societal reaction against gay men is greater than that towards lesbians. This has several reasons.

First, the traditional Judeo-Christian belief is that to waste one's seed (sperm) is a terrible abomination. Thus women are seen as a mere receptacle of seed and therefore not as guilty of same-sex sexual behavior.

Second, women are given much greater freedom in American society to show affection, to hold hands, to embrace, to dance together in public. This makes closet passing easier.

Third, the traditional sex roles are much more rigidly enforced for men. Even in childhood, as seen earlier, tomboys are less "not okay" than are sissies.

Fourth, certain forms of punishment are meted out to males in more severe ways and/or more frequently than to females in American society. Examples are numerous. Spanking in schools is meted out to boys much more frequently than to girls. Sentencing in the judicial system often sees women getting probation more frequently than men, getting less time in prison for the same crimes, and not being convicted by juries of crimes which lead to execution. We also see cops more reluctant to arrest a woman for a DWI offence if mandatory jailing is in effect. The list goes on and on.

Rita:

Kus: Rita, do you think men and women have an equally easy time in publically saying, "I am gay?"

Rita: No. I think that women probably have it a bit easier in our society because women can hug and kiss women who are friends and relatives and that sort of thing. I think it's a little more socially acceptable to be gay if you're a woman. I think it would be a little tougher on men, because they're looked down on upon society more harshly if they're gay. But then there's the other side of the coin too. In our society, the U.S., women are considered second-class citizens. The male is considered the supreme over the two. So, it would seem logical to me that men would like other men.

Sr. Theresa:

Kus: Do you have any notions on the societal level of hostility? Do you think it's more against gay men or lesbians or what?

Sr. T: Gay men. And again, that goes into the whole dichotomy or the hierarchy we have between men and women. Biblically, the injunctions against homosexuality are directed primarily at men. It's because then, as now, men are considered superior for whatever reason. And, therefore, if they don't act out a male role, they were really terrible offenders. What women did was not really considered that important, because women weren't considered that important. So, I would say men really have a very heavy load in that area.

Ethan:

I think two women would have a much easier time living together in rural settings. In the past, and even now, it's been easier for women to show affection toward each other and be together than it has

Ethan cont:

been for men. And I think it's easier for women to set up house. Two women who live together probably can get away with it much easier than men, even if there are rumors. Although I did know of two men who lived together. They came from my rural area and then moved to the city. They were very old and I didn't know of their being gay until after they died. They lived together for years and I don't know if people knew they were gay.

III. HOW TO PASS

In this section we examine some common ways in which closet passing is accomplished. There are dating, male-female marriage, disguised motivational presentation, the "so drunk" syndrome, avoidance, the bisexual phase, becoming an anti-gay crusader, and dropping friends. We also briefly examine the phenomenon of unsuccessful passing.

A. Dating.

Dating the opposite sex is a very common passing technique especially done by the high school gay, the college gay, and those gays living at home. This presents "the straight image" to the audience and thus is designed to throw them off the track.

I tried to maintain a straight reputation while in school. I dated the same girl as a senior in college and we were together all the time. But when I'd take her home; I'd then go and see my gay friends.
(Bob)

Another good example of using dating as a form of pretense has been observed by me for many years in the fraternity world as a fraternity member, faculty advisor and national fraternity leader. Gay men will often engage in sex or heavy petting with their woman friend in their fraternity house room. Unlike their straight fellow brothers,

however, they often plan to be "caught in the act" by brothers by not locking the door, by engaging in the behavior at times when brothers are likely to come to the sleeping areas, etc. Their straight image is then enhanced by razzing about being caught and is highly valued.

B. Male-female marriage.

Probably male-female marriage, on the world level, is the commonest form of passing. Chairman Mao, when serving as leader of one fourth of the earth's population, declared "there are no gay people in China." Being single isn't even a possibility in some societies. In America, there is greater freedom to remain out of male-female marriages than in some societies, especially for men. Adequate statistics on how many gays marry in America are unreliable; gays passing in male-female marriages rarely get into the samples.

It's important to remember that entering a male-female marriage state isn't always done as a passing technique. It occurs for those who are yet unsure of their gay identity as well as those who enter it to "cure" their homosexuality.

Lonny:

I have been married and have two children by my first wife. I married her when I was 19 and divorced her when I was 22. During the last year and a half of marriage I was having gay relationships. After I came out, I married a second time and this lasted for six months. I was feeling guilty being gay and denying it, and felt that my gayness would go away if I married. Finally I divorced her and came out again. I told myself I would never reenter the closet.

Jon:

Kus: Did you ever think you were just going through a phase?

Jon cont:

Jon: Yeah. I was living with a guy in a forest shelter. When he got married I thought so could I. So I married the first woman who came along after three or four dates.

Kus: So you were passing as straight?

Jon: Yeah.

Kus: Do you think you were always gay?

Jon: Yeah. I never had any attraction for women. I think the reason why my wife and I stayed together was that she was also gay. Her college roommate used to come to our house and they would sleep together while I slept on the couch. My wife reacted terribly when I told her I was gay. This is common for someone who has the same "problem".

C. Disguised motivational presentation.

In the mid 1970's, I attended a banquet in Seattle sponsored by The Dorian Group which featured gay football star Dave Kopay. Dave mentioned how he was "picked up" one day by a handsome young man who said, "I'm doing a research project for a sociology class on homosexuality and was wondering if I could interview you." Dave said, to the audience, "Hell, that was the same line I used when I was in college!" The audience roared.

Disguised motivational presentation, then, is carrying out a behavior or role which is done for reasons other than what the behavior or role indicates. Gays might be a sociologist studying gay baths, swimming instructors at the YMCA, etc.

Kus: Now what happened then that you were able to say I am homosexual?

Skip: I was reading an article in the newspaper about the gays in New York. I wanted to affiliate with them, to see how I would react with them and if I fitted in and what I am.

Kus: Did you actually do that?

Skip cont:

Skip: No. I didn't act on it. However, I did go to New York shortly thereafter. I didn't interact with any gay people. After returning from New York someone I knew told me they were gay. I set out to change them. I was into Baptist religion at that time and set out to put them back on the right path.

Kus: How did you do that?

Skip: I started pointing out the different Bible phrases and showing that it was wrong. But that wasn't what I was really doing. When this guy moved to another city, I visited him whenever I could. I liked to be with other gays even though I was still quite closeted and afraid of my feelings. I didn't have sex that often, and still don't go to bars that often. I didn't go to bars by myself until 1974.

D. "I was so drunk..." syndrome.

The "Oh, my God, I was so drunk last night I didn't know what I was doing" syndrome is a typical way of passing as straight while still having same-sex sexual experiences. Besides a technique of passing, it's often used by those who aren't yet aware of their gay identity. Further, the need to get drunk before being able to have gay sexual experiences, is often a mask for guilt. This, when carried out through life, can help explain, in part, the high gay alcoholism rate.

Once during spring break Ted [his fraternity brother] was visiting me at home in Los Angeles. I was always very cautious around my family, but one night Ted and I came in very drunk, our arms around each other's shoulders, and fell into one of the twin beds in the back bedroom. The next morning my younger brother came in and looked at us in amazement, but nothing was ever said. If anybody had said anything we would have passed it off by saying we were drunk and didn't know or remember what we were doing. After all, that was how we explained, and justified, it to ourselves.

(Kopay, 1977, pp. 81-82)



*"Since I don't intend to come out until I'm very rich and very old,
let's sing some of those fabulous heterosexual songs of yesteryear."*

E. Avoidance.

When one is trying hard to pass as straight, one is reluctant to be seen in the presence of open gays or persons who "flaunt" gay stereotypes.

Further, straights may also try to avoid open gays or "gay things" to prevent others from thinking they're gay...avoiding "guilt by association."

An interesting example of this occurred while I was teaching my Gay American course. Straights and closet gays took great pains to hide the covers of their books when in public. Gays who were "coming out of the closet," on the other hand, were more than delighted being seen with the books and, with great flair and flourish, made sure the covers were very visible while having coffee at the student union and in other public places.

Now, like some of the friends that I've met here that are gay, I'm embarrassed to be seen in public with. I'm still in the closet, trying to keep my straight role. There are a few really campy queens,¹ who are the same in public as at a private party.
(Fabian)

F. "I'm bisexual".

It was earlier mentioned that many gays go through a stage thinking they're "bisexuals." Saying "I'm a bisexual" can also be used by gays

¹"Camp" is discussed more fully in Chapter Six under the general heading of "seeing society clearer." In this instance, "campy" is referring to men who fit the stereotype of the super-effeminate, swishy type of man. The origin of "queen" is unknown. This term, a hangover from pre-Stonewall times, refers only to gay men. Today it's usually only used in the context of "drag" or "closet" queens.

in the second stage of coming out. When this is done, it's a genuine technique of closet passing as one has already recognized gay identity in the first stage.

But the gay saying "I am bisexual" can also use this device to "test the waters," to see how the audience will react to this "lesser" type stigma before saying "I am gay." As such, it's an educational tool in the "school" of stage two.

G. Anti-gay crusading.

There's a great deal of evidence in both fictional and non-fictional literature to support the idea that severely homophobic people who publicly proclaim anti-gay rhetoric are, in fact, gay. This is the type of individual about whom Shakespeare might say, "Methinks he protesteth too much." Thus, the gay who has extreme fear and/or guilt may manifest self as an anti-gay crusader and may flee into religious cults or denominations having a "black and white" view of reality.

H. Dropping friends.

One ingenious way of passing reported by Trent is to drop friends who may not accept gayness. This has the feature of preventing rejection before it can occur.

Kus: Have you ever lost any friends as a result of coming out?

Trent: I can't say that I've lost any friends as a result of coming out, but I have not continued relationships as a result. I didn't trust their reactions and didn't want to be hurt. I've never been hurt by someone I've told.

Kus: So, in other words, you give up the friend if you think it's

Trent cont:

going go lead to their rejecting you if you come out?

Trent: Yes. I certainly take a more passive role in the relationship for a period of time. If there's an interest in pursuing it, then fine. I left Virginia largely for that reason. I wanted to come out and didn't want the strain of having someone react to this change and the discomfort of changing the relationship.

I. Passing unsuccessfully.

In spite of every precaution and technique of passing being used, many gays aren't successful in passing. This is seen in several accounts in Chapter 7. Persons watching the gay trying to pass as straight often are too polite to let the gay know they know. This occurred with Fabian. He desperately tried to pass in his fraternity, dating women, etc. Several of his brothers told me in confidence, however, they were "pretty sure" he was gay but didn't want to "hurt his feelings" by letting him in on their suspicions. It was sad to watch.

I find that I can live in both societies. I'm not overtly gay, you know. Sometimes I wonder when people accuse me of being gay since I don't appear to be so. I've not made a pass at anybody so these accusations come out of the clear blue sky. (Skip)

IV. THE GEOGRAPHIC DIMENSION

Perhaps one of the most intriguing things I noticed as I began interviewing in Seattle was that gay native Seattleites were very, very hard to find. With further investigation, it became apparent that geographical moves are often a common feature of the coming out process, especially a feature of stage two.

This section, then, is a discussion of "the move" through looking at

big vs. little and distancing for growth.

A. Big vs. little.

The stage of changing conceptions calls for "schooling," to unlearn the negative preconceived notions and learn the truth about gays. This is best accomplished, according to several of my informants, by meeting lots of gay people.

So, many gays go from the rural hinterlands and smaller towns of America to the big city. Here one is able to find many gay persons as well as gay institutions such as gay bars (serving liquor) and taverns (serving beer and wine), community centers, counseling groups, political and social groups, investment groups, churches and synagogues, etc.

It is also in the big city where one is able to find more progressive attitudes in everyday life. As a result, a gay identity is often not met with the same negative reactions which one often finds in closed, rural areas; many exceptions exist.

Finally, large cities allow for easier passing, a common feature of the changing conception stage. No longer does one have to engage in such things as dating that was "necessary" around persons with whom one grew up.

Lance:

Kus: I've noticed that a lot of gay people in Seattle don't come from Seattle.

Lance: I don't think anyone in Seattle comes from Seattle (laughs). Seems like everyone living in this city has moved here from someplace else.

Kus: In the gay world?

Lance: Well, I wouldn't say that.

Lance cont:

Kus: Do you feel that coming out might have a geographical aspect to it?

Lance: Yes. Coming out and pursuing a gay life is really only possible in a bigger city. It's impossible to lead a gay life in Idaho, with a population of five hundred. Gay people are drawn to the bigger cities, although a lot of gay people live in small towns for economic, family, and political reasons.

Mike:

Kus: There seems to be a lot of gays living in Seattle, from places other than Seattle. Do you have any notion why that is?

Mike: A lot of people in Seattle come from smaller cities, like Tacoma, Spokane, Wenatchee, so forth. It's easier to leave all the problems behind and get lost in Seattle. You don't have to hide; you can be yourself, socially speaking.

Rev. Eric:

Kus: Eric, I've noticed that there's a lot of gay people that live in Seattle that haven't come from Seattle. I'm wondering if coming out can be a geographical thing as well as a psychological thing. What's your thoughts?

Eric: If you're from elsewhere it's easier to come out, and it's easier in a city than small town. You can find other gays easier and live without as much fear. It's easier to live a double life. Originally coming out meant to enter the gay life. Today it seems to be coming out of the closet. In the city it's easier for both. I imagine coming out in the small towns is initially as common as in the city, because you're bound to find someone else no matter where you are.

B. Distancing for growth.

Moving away from home also implies a distancing for growth. This is analogous to taking a monastic retreat. Get away. Get out of the rut. Take time to think and learn outside the confines of stifling influence of friends and relatives. Renew.

Consequently, moves may see a native San Franciscan moving to Seattle

while the native Seattleite moves to San Francisco.

Trent:

Kus: Why did you come to Seattle, in particular?

Trent: I wanted to see the West Coast. Seattle is a large town with a cosmopolitan environment, yet not overly populated like California, and I have friends that moved to Seattle. So it was the ideal place and it was a long way from my other lifetime.

Tony:

Kus: Do you think putting distance between parents and the gay person is part of coming out?

Tony: I think so because it's a cushion. My father had chased me out of town. I came to Seattle to clear my head and figure out who I was. Finally I wrote them a letter. You can think and grow better if you're away from home while your parents still haven't learned acceptance.

V. NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF CLOSET PASSING

The negative effects of closet passing can only be briefly discussed here, because to explore this fully would involve the writing of many books.

Therefore, I note just a few negative aspects of passing for the gay person, for others, and a look at the past vs. present.

A. On the individual.

One's sexual orientation is an integral part of one's identity, especially if the orientation is outside the mainstream. It's a 24-hour a day thing...for life. As such, one engaged in serious closet passing is "on duty" every day, all day.

This leads to a tremendous amount of energy being expended which could

be used in other areas of one's life such as in one's occupation. Further, as an actor playing a role inconsistent with the reality of one's true script, one is unable to fully engage in the honesty which is a mark of the fourth stage of coming out.

Being on stage, as gay, twenty-four hours a day is...very demanding. It is difficult to be spontaneous in one's relations with people when one is seen always as a type rather than as an individual. Yet such passing problems are minor compared with those confronting gays who never feel able to present themselves honestly to others, always being careful to manage their behavior so as to maintain a pretence of heterosexuality.

Such concealment inevitably leads to alienation. The fear of exposure, of living a life that can be collapsed at any moment, forces one to be always 'on': to plot, to plan, to devise strategies of disguise and withdrawal. (Babuscio, 1976, p. 41)

Abbott and Love refer to passing as a type of "sane schizophrenia" which uses psychic energies that could be used for more positive and creative expression (1972, pp. 64-65).

When passing, one can only listen to discussions about gays. As such, one is denied the freedom to correct false statements by saying "I'm gay. What you're saying isn't true."

You definitely play the roles. At work we've gone through the hustler crisis down on Penny's corner, hitting the P-I newspaper coverage over coffee break and the Estes [anti-gay Mormon who led an anti-gay initiative drive and was defeated] thing, etc. I role play. But I'm sure the people that are pretty liberal and open-minded wouldn't say anything to purposely hurt anybody. If they thought I was homosexual some of the tacky quasi joke thing would not be said. But there are some very red-neck towards gay people, and I think it's due to their never having met a gay person and going on the stereotypes. (Cimarron)

One is denied certain freedoms of action such as spending Christmas with one's lover at home with the family or buying a gay book.

I went to the library and read. I didn't check anything out. I didn't want my name appearing on the library card. I was quite paranoid. (Bob)

B. On other gays.

Besides having negative effects on the individual, passing as straight denies other gays, especially those just trying to change their conceptions, role models. The closeted gay is, therefore, a library of information; the library's sign says "closed."

C. On others.

Playing deception affects those whom one is deceiving. The effects may be passive or active.

"Passive" effects refer to the denial of information to others. An open gay who's "out" at work, for example, finds s-he becomes a reference source, a counselor, a confidant. Over and over s-he hears, "You're the first open gay person I've known." The gay is then open to listen to fears parents have about their gay child, wives sharing concerns about their gay husband, the list goes on. This is similar to the nurse in the neighborhood who finds himself giving advice on a sick child or the lawyer who finds herself giving legal advice at a cocktail party. Passing prevents any of this from happening.

"Active" effects refers to the hurting of the person to whom one was being dishonest.

One of the things about honesty was my eliminating taking out women for the purpose of presenting an image. It was dehumanizing to the women I was taking out. So I decided the woman has a right to know why I am dating her and that she can't expect any more than a friendship. And I have women friends now who accept that. This honesty eliminated a lot of discomfort, the frustration I felt and the frustration for the other person.

(Vincent)

D. Looking back.

A near universal belief among persons who have reached state IV of coming out - action, and who engaged in closet passing in the past, is that it really wasn't worth it. Better one should "get it over with" all at once than to drag the process on through game-playing.

Kus: How about negative aspects of coming out? What do you think those are?

Tony: It's a head trip which could almost drive you insane. You've got society's pressures and your parents not accepting things. You've got friends abandoning you and people, relatives, black-balling you from the list.

Kus: Did that happen to you?

Tony: Yeah. I've got one aunt that won't speak to me. She keeps sending me religious things against homosexuality. She hasn't for a year, so maybe her eyes are opening a little bit.

E. Past vs. present.

Times, they are a changin.' Passing in the recent past was even more profound than at present. This concept is seen over and over again in the accounts of older gays. Here's one such account.

Rev. Eric:

Kus: Did you ever feel bad that you were gay?

Eric: Oh, yes, for a long time. I was very indoctrinated in sin and was aware of being a sinner. For most of my life it was a crime to be a homosexual. We were aware of breaking the law. Plus the social rejection; we lived in desperate fear of society. Rejection was so terrible and we discovered what happened to our friends. I think we would have betrayed our

Eric cont:

parents to avoid being discovered. We really led double lives the fear was so great.

Kus: Do you find since gay liberation and more openness in our society about being gay, that problems will decrease or are decreasing as people are coupling?

Eric: I think so. I don't know about the alcohol and drugs. The biggest share of young people today are involved in alcohol and drugs, not more heavily in alcohol than we were. It's a drug scene. Apart from that, the young person today doesn't begin to labor under what we did. Suicide attempts for gay causes I think are less. I feel that people of my age group who have been through comparable experiences have been deeply damaged. I doubt that we will ever be totally at ease. I've made peace with a lot of things but underneath I harbor a deep anger at what society has done to me and the friends of my younger days. I will never forget that. I do not trust our society at all.

VI. CHANGING CONCEPTIONS

In this section, we look at some of the sources which lead to changing conceptions of gays, some effects these changing ideas have on the individual, a look at initial disillusionment one may experience on first exploring other gays, and some male-female difference one finds when first looking at groups of open gays.

A. Sources.

Negative preconceived notions are dispelled in a number of ways. Some of these are through the media, literature, friends and lovers, and gay groups.

1. The media.

With the advent of gay liberation, the increase in the number of

open gays has been reflected in increased newspaper and magazine stories. This is of special importance not only for the public's education, but also to the rural gay.

The first account shows the effect of television on changing conceptions.

Kus: Did literature play any part in your changing perception of what gay people were like?

Paris: Not really. I read. There was a TV show when I was a sophomore called An American Family or something, on PBS. It was a documentary of a family. A camera was in this home just filming everything that was going on. During this show the oldest son came out. I remember feeling WOW, this is happening right here and it's really energizing. By talking with my friends it became more acceptable to myself. A woman friend of mine had been gone about a year and had had a relationship with a woman. We had been very much alike and shared everything. When she started talking about that and I read this book, The Front Runner, it kinda put everything in a new perspective, and I decided to check it out.

The next two accounts show how magazines and newspapers lead two young Montanans, neither of whom had ever been to a big city, to get some ideas about leaving Montana to go to Seattle. Terry's account further highlights how being an open gay (Mitch) helps the closet gay as a source of information and support.

I remember reading an article in ADAM, that men's magazine four or five years ago. It was on gays in San Francisco and had beautiful pictures of men, not the type I thought were gay before. I had this premonition of very feminine men being gay. I thought, wow, if there's good looking men that are gay, maybe I better start doing something about it! I realized that I could be happy and fulfilled because there were sex objects and relationships as beautiful as I had pictured. They had a picture of a guy with the ass cut out of the pants and he had a beautiful ass. (Monty)

Frustration built up until I had to call one person who I knew was

gay, because I read in a KALMIN (the student newspaper of the University of Montana) that this person was gay. So I called him up and I guess that's when I first came out. (Terry)

2. Literature.

As was seen in Chapter Three, there is currently a boom in positive gay literature being published. While this is important for the education of the public at large as well as to build a source of pride for the average gay person, it's especially crucial for the rural gay and the live-at-home high school gay.

3. Friends and lovers.

For the person who is able to obtain his or her "schooling" first hand in a city, it is generally agreed that real live open gays provide a better education than can be found in lectures or books.

Kus: Have you ever used written material to find out what gays were like?

Marty: Not except for the last three years.

Kus: Has it been helpful?

Marty: It's been helpful, but for the most part, learning about gay life first hand has been more helpful. Once I gained some confidence from other gays, I ventured out on my own to some bars. I went to places in West Virginia, Chicago, Champagne and Carbondale.

Friends and lovers share information with the gay who's beginning the search for the truth about gays, listen to his or her concerns, offer support. This process done by open gays for about-to-come-out gays is known as "bringing someone out."

Kus: One of the things that you've brought up a couple of times in our discussion is the notion of helping someone come out, or sometimes it's referred to as bringing someone out. How do you do that? What does that mean?

Sr. Theresa: To me it means to really listen, to ask questions, to help the person come to their own consciousness, but also to stand back and not try and push them in either direction. Just because someone has had a homosexual experience does not automatically make them gay or lesbian, and vice versa. I feel in counseling it is very important to listen to the person, listen to the themes that pervade what they're saying and reflect on what these might mean. When the person hears back or hears rephrasing of what they're searching through, they can often come to their own conclusions. I believe that no one hears another person or helps them solve their problems. We solve our own problems. We just need someone to share energy with us in the process.

Kus: In this helping someone to come out, do you ever recommend reading?

Sr. T: Oh yes. Things that have been meaningful to me. Depending on the person, it can be things on basic relationships or sometimes it can be definitely oriented towards lesbian types of readings - like Lesbian/Woman, which is a classic and best to date. If it's a religious type of issue, the McNeil (THE CHURCH AND THE HOMOSEXUAL, 1970) is always handy. It doesn't matter which sex wrote the article or to whom I'm talking. It's just respecting the individual and trying to respond to his or her need.

Examples of being "brought out" are seen in the accounts of Monty and Marty.

Monty:

I met my first roommate that I lived with for my first six months in Seattle and had thousands of questions. He was my age and had been out for a year. He could answer a lot of my questions, took me out to see gay bars, introduced me to a lot of kids my own age - 18 at the time.

And Marty:

Kus: What helped you accept your gay identity?

Marty: I felt a lot of guilt, but I felt a lot of pleasure too (laughs). I think the most important thing that helped me accept a gay identity was having friends who were gay. When I was in the

Marty cont:

fraternity there was one special person who brought me out. I had relationships with both this man and a couple of other people within a short period of time. These were people I really cared about and were really good to me as friends and sex partners. Working with these people that I had a lot of respect for made it a lot easier for me to understand my own feelings.

Kus: Were they all in your fraternity?

Marty: Yes. The ones I had sexual experiences with.

Kus: How did you know the first guy was gay?

Marty: We knew each other for a long time and it gradually came to the point where we confided in each other about our mutual attractions towards men, who was cute, and things like that. It took a long time to get there. He was very infatuated with me, and the thought of the first sex experience was very exciting. Because we had known each other for nine months and it was a gradual process, helped me make the transition from heterosexual activity to gay activity in a smooth way. I did have one affair with a woman after having gay sex and it was very unsatisfying for me, very unnatural. So after that I only had gay experiences.

Kus: So you got over your guilt because of your respect for these gay fraternity brothers?

Marty: Guilt is a hard thing for me to remember because it's a thing I try to erase from my mind. I'm sure I still have a lot of hidden guilt. For example, as far as masturbation goes, there's a depressed feeling after coming to a climax. I think it's because for so long you have a guilty conscience when masturbating, especially if you masturbate to gay-oriented material. But it's no big thing and I'm working on overcoming it. By knowing people who were sharing the same feelings I was going through, I had less guilt and didn't go through a guilt crisis.

Kus: What's a guilt crisis?

Marty: That would be where guilt from actions would actually disrupt my daily pattern so that I couldn't function. I know some gays like that. They just can't handle their first gay experience. I would call that a guilt crisis.

Finally, getting gay friends and/or lovers help dispel the feeling that one is alone.

In the first place in the very small town I was in when I came out, there was only one of us and that was me. In Spokane I initially came out into the society of gay people and it was very positive. There were a lot more people like myself and they were making relationships. I had more social life after coming out. I felt comfortable with drinking and dancing... things I enjoyed doing, whereas I didn't feel comfortable doing them in straight society. (Xavier)

4. Gay groups.

In the initial exploration of the gay community, the gay person lacks the sophistication to discern between gay groups and lacks the knowledge to realize the scope of what's offered. This often leads the gay person to join a group of gays which doesn't meet one's needs. For example, in the initial excitement of coming to the big city, the rural Montanan may join a gay political group while s-he may actually learn more and have more fun in a gay bowling league or yachting club. Here's an example of a lesbian who went to the community center only to discover that it was mostly a gay men's group.

Kus: So, you did do some reading:

Sr. Theresa: Yeah.

Kus: And what else did you do?

Sr. T: I did some volunteer work at the Gay Community Center, which wasn't the best place for me cause it was a male center predominately. I needed women to talk to and deal with.

However, even coming in contact with a group one isn't destined to be part of in the future often brings positive results. One is able to learn what else is going on other places, and one is able to make friends who have interests other than what the group they're found in offers.

I remember the first thing I did when I got to Seattle was look in the phone book and look under "gay." I found Gay Community Center and thought, "Wow, there actually is such a thing!" and that's how I got my roommate. (Monty)

The only negative effect of joining gay rap groups by the gay who's in Stage II was articulated by Carol (whose whole interview is in the back of this book). In essence, she believes that many gays learn the rhetoric of the group while failing to deal with self on a personal introspective level. She advises, therefore, for persons in this stage to hang around with "together, settled" persons be they straight or gay. Thus one can learn solid ways of living rather than running around saying "I'm a woman and therefore strong" or "I'm gay and can do anything." One needs positive examples more than rhetoric to change negative notions and build a happy and solid life.

B. Effects.

As one learns more in this stage, ideas about gays change rapidly. The following examples show the effect the "schooling" has on gays.

Fabian:

I'd had a lot of chances to talk with...my lover in Honolulu...a real person, and I learned a lot there. I had thought I was the the only gay person in Missoula, Montana before talking with my lover. I've certainly learned differently!

Monty:

Oh, my views about gays are completely different. Just being exposed, being around, and associating with, living with, and loving, I've met some fantastic gay people.

Ethan:

Kus: Ethan, you said that you talked earlier about the notion of guilt, that you experienced. How did you get over that?

Ethan cont:

Ethan: I thought I did come out and accept it. I met a person who was really neat. We were lovers for a year and a half. Meeting him and his friends was an uplifting experience. I was really able to get away from a lot of guilt. The people I saw around me were people I could respect and that helped a lot. I also had therapy and that helped too.

Cliff:

Kus: What did it do for you personally when you came out to other people? In that bar situation, did it help you psychologically?

Cliff: Yeh, it was like being born again. I met all kinds of nice people I could talk to and relate with. All those years I hadn't been able to talk to anyone and everything was held in, and for the next five years you couldn't shut me up.

Cimarron:

Kus: Do you do a lot of reading about gays?

Cimarron: Not really, can't say I do.

Kus: How did you know how to speak the vocabulary of the gay world?

Cimarron: That came through several hard and fast years of being a resident of gay bars, where I learned the vernacular. I was a fixture at the El Sir (a gay bar) for happy hour for probably five or six years on into the night. Basically a bitch fight most of the time...I didn't like myself so no one else should have the privilege of enjoying their time either. Trying to be just as disgusting as I possibly could be to everybody within ear shot.

Kus: And you got over that?

Cimarron: I would say that...I had a miraculous cure. I still occasionally get bitchy and insufferable in public, but for the most part, I far more enjoy the more stable life that I've got, staying home, reading and watching TV, camping on the weekend rather than staying stone blind drunk most of the time. I still go down and I keep a lot of acquaintances and a few friends work in the bars, but I don't spend every night down there.

The final example hints to a very important aspect of meeting many gays. Men especially report feeling much more positive about being gay

when they see there are very handsome gay men. Destroying the idea that most gays look like Truman Capote has profound positive effects on many gay men.

In college one year there were four people who were gay or bi or whatever. I got to know them and realized they were gay and involved with each other. I couldn't believe it. They were very clean cut, collegiate, into sports had a lot of women friends, and really broke the stereotype. I met people and thought you just can't go by the stereotype. So it made it easy for me when I finally decided to get in touch with who I was. It freed me up, gave me permission to be anything. It wasn't that I had to be like one of the typical things I heard about when I was younger. That turned me off I guess. (Paris)

C. Initial disillusionment.

All is not necessarily a bed of roses upon initial exploration of the gay community. Some persons report experiencing disillusionment which centers primarily on the promiscuity seen especially among men. This disillusionment then forces the gay person to go through another "head trip" to come up with the idea that s-he can live as s-he chooses and doesn't have to be promiscuous, an alcohol abuser, or whatever. This is especially seen in Paris' account.

Paris:

Kus: Is there anything that you'd like to add that might be important in your coming out?

Paris: I think I had a lot of unrealistic expectations. I wanted to go from this very happy marriage that was just broken up to the same sort of thing. I found that's not really possible right off the bat. It's kind of disillusioning in finding out about the gay life.

Kus: Give me an example of a disillusionment.

Paris: The quick pick up in the bar and home for one night, and wham bang thank you man. The next morning the person is gone and you don't even know who they are, it's just an experience I'll never forget. I really expected to hear from this person.

Paris cont:

I talked to a friend and he was scheduled to leave on a plane after he left me that morning and I never heard from him again. Situations like that at the very beginning really put me in a pretty bad head space. I got depressed and kinda closed myself off to everything. Went into almost monastic seclusion and internalized everything, thinking what's wrong with me. That's when I thought it would be so much nicer to go back to the old days. Time and meeting people gave me a better idea and how not to set myself up again. Then I thought I had the basic ground rules and could enjoy my life. It was good to come to that realization because it allows for relationships and long term involvement without that expectation that each person you meet is going to be Mr. Right. I admit that I'm one who in the back of my head is looking for Mr. Right. I've got this image. Coming out was good, it was a period of disillusionment in coming across hard, cold realities and then accepting and dealing with those realities and deciding how I could fit in and make it work for me. Since then it's been 180 degrees in terms of the kinds of feelings I have about myself and the whole lifestyle and is much better.

And Lonny:

Kus: Have there been any negative things that have come out of your coming out?

Lonny: Yeah. The negative things I see in gay life are mainly affairs. They're dying to have affairs and it's not like in straight life when you can decide to have an affair and get married. You try in straight life to really make it work. In gay life, it's what the hell, it ain't working, goodbye, I'll find somebody else. This is the only problem in gay life. There are exceptions but the majority of relationships don't last...and too many games to play.

D. Male-female differences.

In my initial days of interviewing for "Gay Freedom," I was struck by an observation which I wondered if it was also seen by gays in the changing conception stage. Namely, I saw gay men as a group being very neat, slim, and well dressed as compared to straight men. Lesbians, on

the other hand, were more often chunky and not well dressed as compared to straight women.

"You know," he said after he'd winked back at himself, "we queens must be genetically different."

"Oh?"

"Well, look at us. Here we are, carrying on all the time, out drinking and screwing every night, and yet most of us look at least five years younger than straights our age."

"The glories of clean living obviously," I observed.

(Steinberg, 1980, p. 119)

A word of warning here. Sociological generalizations are not to be made for each individual. Rather, generalizations merely reflect a usual or familiar kind of thing seen often within groups. Further, stereotypes are usually exaggerations of reality yet have some basis for their existence. Fabian, for instance, one time told me that a "pot belly" would be totally unacceptable for himself and for a lover.

From the literature I found many references to this observation.

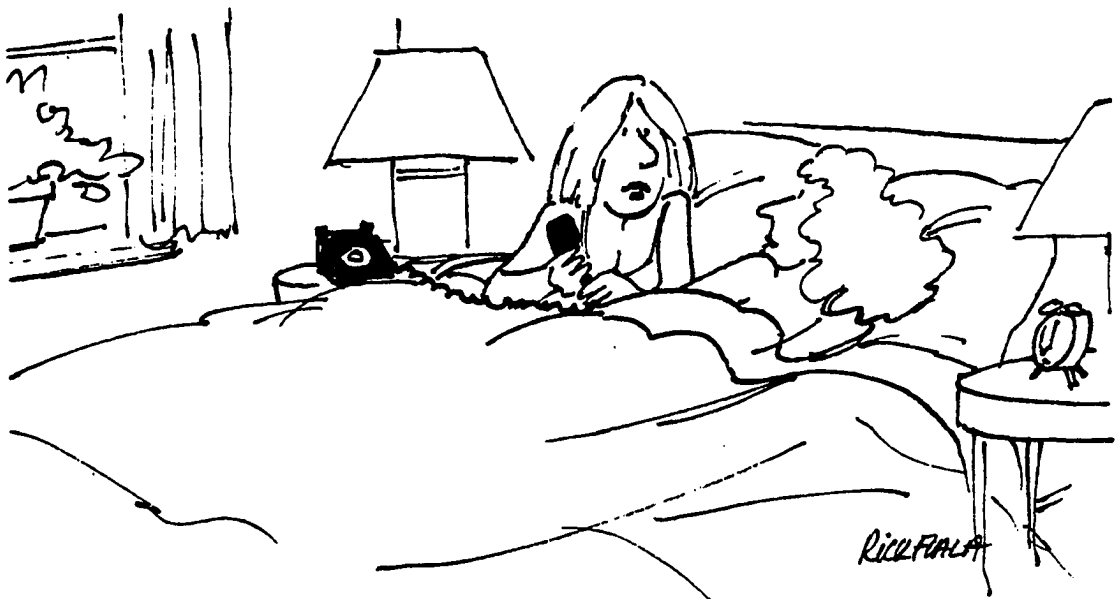
Here are two:

Unlike the non-Gay man who is supposed to not notice other male bodies, the Gay man does notice other men and sees what is naturally beautiful about a body that is well cared for with self-respect. The Gay man is more likely to watch his food intake and less likely to get paunchy. The Gay woman is less likely to preen with a palette of paints and devices to disguise her true form since she is appreciative of the natural body beauty of a woman.
(Clark, 1977, p. 36)

and:

Why is it that many homosexual men tend to "make the most of their looks" while many lesbians seem to be careless about matters of "beauty?"

Because in subtle and not so subtle ways, most people's style of self-presentation is geared to the anticipated market. And since the "male eye" tends to be highly visual and symbolic in its response - i.e., attuned more to surface features than to "deeper values" - homosexual men and heterosexual women have to take this into account.
(Tripp, 1975, p. 285)



"It's my parents. Quick, help me think of something heterosexual to say."

Informants tried to grapple with this issue and found it difficult to say exactly why this occurs. Further, gays indicated very frequently that they hated to generalize. Perhaps this is due to so many negative generalizations made against gays making them gun-shy of this whole process. Interestingly enough, none of the lesbian informants fit into the generalization of fat or sloppy.

Rita:

Kus: I've noticed in the gay community that a lot of times gay men are dressed very nicely, take better physical care of their bodies in terms of weight control than straight men as a group. And I've noticed that lesbians seem often to be chunky and overweight and sloppy compared to straight women. Have you noticed this and do you have any thoughts about it?

Rita: Sure. I've noticed and I've thought a lot about it. I try to keep my weight down and not to be messy, sloppy... that offends me. That's why I thought about it so much. Why are these women looking so sloppy? I'm not attracted to that. I think it's a couple of things. One, they don't want to be attractive to men, including some feminist women who are not gay. When Gloria Steinam was on the Phil Donohue show she wore a dress made out of burlap tied around the center with a tiny bit of baling twine. To me she looked good, but you don't have to be dressed up to be liked. If you're a woman, a real person, people like you whether you're dressed up or not. That's kinda the feminist aspect of it. Gay women dressing down is also a way of signaling to other gay women, hey, I'm different, I'm gay. There does seem to be some similarity in the manner of dress of this group. There are probably a lot of gay women who dress up and so we don't notice them. Another thing is it's kind of anti-establishment...ok, society doesn't accept me and I'm not going to dress in these traditional ways because 1) it's uncomfortable and 2) there's not a role model for the gay women. There are very few gay women who are in the public eye who are setting an example. This is how you should dress, speak, be. I think another reason is to be comfortable, be you and if someone will like you it won't be a man because you're dressing dowdy. It's probably a combination.

Sr. Theresa:

Kus: Is there anything you'd like to say? My questions are over.

Sr. T: Not really. I'm just kinda fascinated by the earlier question about body types and appearances. I'm thinking men are generally starting to take more care with their appearance. We have a cultural trend here where men are allowed to be more decorative than previously allowed. I think they're enjoying that right, wearing necklaces, bracelets, even carrying handbags, kinds of colors are coming out. And women in reverse. We're getting away from being a so-called sex object. Women are generally taking more time or having more occasion to be sloppy. As far as a chunky body type, being slender is a sexual symbol, so I could see how lesbian women would want to go against that. I also think there's a possibility eating habits are involved.

Kus: Why eating habits?

Sr. T: That's what I'm trying to get a handle on. Alcoholism is on the rise. I'm wondering if we're really being concerned about our health. Any person not having self respect or trying to please others can get really sloppy in appearance. Then we're talking not so much about chunky types as obesity and bad health. The whole idea seems sorta interesting.

Ethan:

I just think among gay men there is an emphasis on physical, physicality, physicalness. A lot of initial contact is made sorta on the basis of how one looks, sexual contacts or whatever. That would be the kinda reason that I think gay men look better than straight men or take care of their bodies more. Another reason is that most straight men are married, and since they already have their spouse they might get lazy and think they don't have to stay in shape, but that's one reason for staying in shape. I think there is a shift among people to be in good health and take care of it.

As far as lesbians being sloppy or whatever, I just don't know. I know some of them sorta have a stereotype masculine image where some gay men have a more feminine manner. Gay women are more tuned to have a home and nest, and settle down. Like they're together with partners, and they don't think it's important. But why I don't know.

VII. OPENING THE CLOSET DOOR

Before we close this chapter, we look at ways gays can begin to open the closet door. Discussed are picking and choosing, giving clues, increased ease of disclosure, relaxing, and getting ready for Stages III and IV.

A. Picking and choosing.

After one has changed her or his ideas about gays and having seen many open gays, s-he is ready to come out of the closet. But one may still pass for straight in some situations; one picks and chooses who to tell. This is especially seen in the work setting.

In Xavier's account, we see an example of passing with some customers and not others. Notice the lack of intensity that is characteristic of "serious" closet passing.

Xavier:

Kus: Are you out with your customers?

Xavier: I don't with my customers, because I have clients that are a cross section of today's society. I've come out with a few of them. One customer is a very intelligent woman who's the director of a service organization. She was mentioning getting the Seattle Gay News and she was up in arms about this policeman they're trying to get rid of. My inward reaction was one of shock. She appears to be a proper lady and intelligent with a good position. I thought, "Gee, if she knew I was gay" but I just conversed with her on the subject and in fact told her that "oh, yeah, the Seattle Gay News, we get that too." I told her about another article I had read. So I don't think it's so much a matter of telling someone you're gay as just letting them decide. Such as Mary. I'm sure she could care less whether I'm straight or gay. But I see no point in having to tell her I'm gay. I don't think it makes a difference one way or another.

Xavier cont:

Kus: Why don't you think it makes a difference one way or another?

Xavier: Because she's in a professional position where she has to cope with all different life styles and she has to weigh each situation individually. She doesn't have a set rule that you will not be this or that.

In Lance's account, we see a common feature of Stage II, i.e., thinking that personal life can and should be separated from the work-place. We also see Lance thinking that perhaps he won't always have this idea.

Kus: Are you out at work?

Lance: Not really. I'd rather not be.

Kus: Why is that?

Lance: Because it goes back to pretense. What I do in my bedroom is my own business. I don't see what business it is of anyones who I go to bed with. If they assume, that's up to them, but I don't stand on my desk and shout it out. I do know some guys at work who are gay but I've never said, hey, I know you're gay. I am too. I think your professional life and personal life are two separate entitites so to speak. If I feel that the time is right, I'll tell them. If I feel they shouldn't, I won't.

Finally, in Stage II, one begins being torn between being in the closet and being out of the closet. It's analogous to the college graduate anxious to leave the nest of academia while fearing what it'll be like on one's own.

I think there's still a fear in a large number of people who are gay, who admit it and tell their close friends and family, in dealing with the situation, because their jobs depend on it. I think I'm kinda in that position now. One side of me says I don't care if they know or not, another side says, it's none of their business, and a third part is if they do find out what is the reaction. If you're dealing with people all the time you have to be concerned with this. I'd love to always be in the position where it didn't matter. If that situation arose I could cause people to understand what being gay is like and help to dispel myths and false images that people have of gay people. I'm not always sure that this is the situation, that it's a situation

of financial security and that the boss was not concerned with who he was doing business with. (Vincent)

B. Giving clues.

In between "serious" passing and being "very open," gays often attempt to give clues to others. It's sort of a rehearsal time and allows the person to study reactions and get ready to proclaim "I am gay."

Kus: Is there anything we haven't covered that you'd like to say Lance?

Lance: I don't know if I was good being interviewed on coming out 'cause I'm right in the middle of it now.

Kus: That's perfect.

Lance: Half my friends know; half don't. My birthday is March 11th. March 10th we're having a party and I've made sure that half the people are gay and half of them are straight. If they don't know after the party, that's life.

Kus: So, that's going to be a big event for you?

Lance: Yeah. It's going to be one of the biggest events in my life.

Kus: Sounds very exciting!

Lance: I hope it will be. I hope it turns out.

The second example is a most typical situation which I've observed several times. The setting is a work office. The cast is "O", an open gay, "C", a gay open to "O" but not others at work, and "S", a straight. "O" and "C" are talking about something gay. As person "S" enters the office, "C's" vocabulary becomes very generalized; "THE GAY MYSTIQUE" then becomes "that book." "C" studies the reaction of "O" to see what "O" is thinking. As "O" continues quite relaxed, "C's" conversation will become specific again to the point where s-he doesn't mind if "S" over-

hears the gay talk.

C. Increased ease of disclosure.

Practice makes perfect. The more one opens the closet door, the less it creaks. As the gay person discovers that her or his fears of the sky falling down upon disclosing gay identity are usually unfounded, s-he will find disclosure easier.

Kus: Who have you told that you are gay?

Paris: Rarely do I point blank come out and tell anyone that I'm gay. The first year I was kinda withdrawn and wasn't very open about talking about anything that was going on with me. Then I slowly started feeling more comfortable with the idea of people knowing that Paris has gone through some changes, and it's the same old Paris just grown in some ways. My attitude now is that I will not lie to anyone about being gay but I won't come up to someone and say hi, I'm Paris, I'm gay. I was much more comfortable this past year being seen in public associated with other gay people or gay functions or organizations.

D. Relaxing.

When one initially begins opening the closet door, one can experience very uncomfortable and "shaky" feelings. However, with practice, one begins to experience a relaxation not previously felt when one was on stage 24 hours a day. This is seen in these two accounts, the first an example of "before" and the second, "after."

Before:

Kus: You were passing as a straight person in the years before you were planning your coming out?

Mike: Yes. I don't believe it now, but I got away with it quite well. Ran in politics on campus and won quite a few elections. Lost a couple too.

Mike cont:

Kus: Did you date?

Mike: Yes, occasionally. Only when it was necessary.

Kus: So, from 1955 it took you four years to actually have any sex?

Mike: Right. On a small campus you just do not do that. Although I knew people who were doing it. I even acted, played like I didn't know what they were doing. They were friends of mine. I know now that they even thought where is Mike, he's so crazy. All he does is get involved in politics. And he knows what we're doing. I put it out of mind that it existed.

Kus: Why did you get involved in politics?

Mike: To keep busy. To make sure that I didn't do what I was planning to do after college was over. Cause you know in Spokane to be homosexual at that time was the worst thing that could ever happen. So if you are just hiding it, you can leave town later, which is what I did.

After:

Kus: Skip, how long do you think you've been gay?

Skip: Being truthful about it, as long as I can remember. I remember two male figures on TV, I think it was Red Rider, and I wanted to see them nude. I guess because they turned me on. Even so I didn't come out until '72. Coming out as to say that I realize that my sexual orientation wasn't really heterosexual. Being in the navy kinda hinders that, makes it hard and paranoid about going out and whatever. Since I've been here I've started to relax a little more. I'm seeing a counselor at the gay center, the counseling center, and he has helped me overcome a lot of problems. Coping with life in general, and I've started to read more gay books which seems to help me relax.

E. Getting ready for stages III and IV.

Having changed one's ideas, the schooling is now over. One prepares to accept self as gay in a positive light and act on that belief. Here are two examples.

Mark:

Mark: I had been feeling that I was a bad boy, that I was displeasing

Mark cont:

to the family, disappointing to friends, that kind of thing. My attitudes about homosexuality were largely taken through an acculturation process which early on talked about fairies, queers, that kind of thing.

Kus: Did you ever feel guilty about being gay?

Mark: Oh, yes.

Kus: What did you do about that to get over it? I assume you're over it.

Mark: Yes. I never dealt with it head-on really, until I came to Seattle. That it was OK, that I am OK.

Kus: What happened in Seattle that made you decide to deal with it?

Mark: I was sent here by my employer in San Francisco to open this office. Before that I was in the military. One of the reasons I left the military, resigned my commission, was because of my increasing awareness of the incompatibility of who I was, sexually speaking, and the policies of the army. I didn't like that. I got involved in a relationship in San Francisco. I found myself explaining the relationship in very creative terms and then recognized that I was telling a lie. This constant finding myself telling a lie grated on me so heavily that when I came up here the relationship ended, which was certainly a freeing experience. I made a whole fresh beginning and recognized it as such. I decided to change a lot, not just a new outlook on relationships but a new sense of responsibility. Finding a better way of relating to the public, friends and not constantly telling lies. The first thing I did was to hire a secretary. I contacted a couple of gay agencies, went to Spags the first weekend, and picked up an early issue of what became Seattle Gay News, the Newsletter from the Gay Community Center. It had a news article about the Jobline Project, which was just getting started. So I figured it's time to shit or get off the pot. I had been saying to myself through my early involvement with SIR (Society for Individual Rights) down in San Francisco that it's time for us to help ourselves and each other. So I said, here's a chance to do it. I called the community center and Bill was referred to me. I decided to hire Bill and out of that I had several people including Don. Through Don I met Nat and one time Don called the office and said to Bill do you want to participate in a weekend group that Nat was putting together. Bill said no and Nat asked if I would be interested. I said sure and wrote it down on my calendar and forgot about it til the day of the workshop. Then I realized what I'd gotten myself into.

Mark cont:

I decided the challenge and went to it and that was the catalyst that triggered it. I came out of that weekend, the encounter process, feeling very good about myself and who I was. It was great.

Cliff:

Kus: When you had that guilt in the very beginning, do you remember how you dealt with it and got rid of it?

Cliff: I think it just came with time. I had the idea that I was suppose to go dances with girls and do the normal things, which I tried but was extremely uncomfortable. There were times that I had to take a girl home and everyone wondered why I didn't put the make on her, which I just couldn't do. I tried a couple of times but it made me extremely uncomfortable, so I avoided it as much as I could. I just went fishing with straight friends, not in any contact relation, and that's how I kept myself.

Kus: Where did you finally come out to other people?

Cliff: It was during WW II, and I was assistant manager of the Admiral Theater over here. I had a doorman who liked me and took me to the Marine Room at the Olympic Hotel which was about the only gay bar besides the Double Header. It was illegal for me to be there, but no one asked because it was so full of service men anyway. And that's when I first started making contact with people and made friends ever since.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we learned something about the second stage of the coming out process, changing conceptions. We explored the concept of passing, the why, how and where of passing, some negative effects of passing for self and others, some changing conceptions, and opening the closet door.

CHAPTER SIX - OUT OF THE CLOSET - ACCEPTANCE AND ACTION

*Tell me why you're smiling my son.
Is there a secret you can't tell everyone?
Do you know more than men that are wise?
Can you see what we all must disguise
Through your loving eyes?
(From "Day is done" by Peter, Paul & Mary)*

INTRODUCTION.

In Chapter Six, I take the reader on an exploration of the last two stages in the coming out process, acceptance of self and action. Why, one might ask, do the other two stages each have a separate chapter while here there are two stages in one chapter? The answer is threefold.

First, acceptance and action, once achieved, are ongoing for life unlike the first two stages of coming out.

Second, in real life, these stages often occur so closely to each other that it would appear they happen simultaneously.

Third, and most importantly, there is simply too much information on just the action stage alone to cover in this work. Therefore, I leave the reader with just a minimum amount of information to be able to capture the flavor of the two stages, and then I present an in-depth look at one specific type of action - disclosure of identity to family - in Chapter Seven.

The reader will note that this chapter raises as many questions as it provides answers. The list provided for further research is rich in depth and awesome in scope and challenging to other researchers both in

sociology and other fields.

With this introduction, we now enter the Stage of Acceptance - gay freedom.

I. GAY FREEDOM - ACCEPTANCE.

Freedom. A most elusive concept. A concept so powerful that armies throughout Earth's history have gone to battle and spilled blood to achieve it. Freedom is the state of being free, free to do and free from certain things. An early symbolic interactionist, Charles Horton Cooley, defined freedom as "...that phase of the social ideal which emphasizes individuality..." (1962, p. 46).

In the very early days of my research, I asked my informants if they had experienced any "benefits of coming out." After gathering this list, and after looking at the total picture, I came to the conclusion that "benefits of coming out" were actually manifestations or common features of the stage of acceptance. People were telling me what it means to have acceptance of self! Gay freedom, then, is to be free from the guilt and fear we saw in stage II, the freedom to talk gay, disclose identity, to be free to work for social change.

In this section, then, we look at some of these manifestations. Included are: self becoming whole, freedom, seeing society more clearly, increased self-confidence, energy release, guilt reduction, honesty and candidness. We also look at the possibility of going backwards into stage II and also some mental health considerations inherent in this stage.

A. Becoming whole.

In the last chapter, we saw that gays passing as straight are torn in two, or as Abbott and Love would say, are "sane schizophrenics." In gay settings, such persons can "be gay," while in the straight world, they must "play straight."

For the individual achieving acceptance, the self becomes whole. It is "integrated." In this stage, the very idea that one could deny identity is seen as "absurd." Further, the individual believes that by denying gay identity, s-he is, in fact, sending a negative message to self in a self-talking-to-self way. Here are three examples.

Sr. Theresa:

Kus: Are you happy you're lesbian?

Sr. T: Yeah, because it's a very important part of me. And you know, to deny any part of me is just absurd. You know, it means that I've missed out on something really special, and I see it as a gift, and whatever it is, it's part of me and helps me to be the person I am. That means a lot to me. Denying the fact that I'm lesbian would be like denying the fact that I'm a woman. It's part of my identity. And I feel very good about it.

Lance:

It seems like...everytime you deny being gay, you're sending a negative message to yourself that being gay is wrong. That's why I'm trying to stop it. In fact, that's what the premise is when I tell my friends I'm gay. I'm not denying that I lived a lie before. And it's my own faults, making girl jokes. But within the last six months I logic it out that being gay is not wrong, and I'm not going to tell girl jokes anymore. I'm not going to pretend I'm straight when I'm not. Because when I pretend to be straight, I'm telling myself that being gay is wrong, and I don't know if I believe that or not. And that's all right.

Rev. Eric:

I think a greater normalization of daily life and self-acceptance are the main benefits. One feels more whole and not so divided as we used to. I'm sure that everyone who lives in the closet today

Eric cont:

are very divided people. That's a very sick way to have to live.

B. Freedom.

The profound nature of the concept of freedom is seen in the following accounts. It is worthy to note the words surrounding "freedom" in the accounts such as "happy," "strength," and "power." "Freedom," by careful examination of these accounts, can be thought of as a bright star. The rays of light emanating from this star are "power" and "honesty" and so on. Hence, we conclude these other concepts are merely indexicals, or common features, of freedom.

Mark:

Kus: What kind of benefits did you receive on coming out? You touched on them.

Mark: A sense of freedom. Freedom that comes from being released from that compulsion to be dishonest about something that's very fundamental about your character. It gave me a tremendous sense of strength and power. I felt really good. The core thing is a sense of freedom. Being free of being dishonest. The business could have gone to hell in a handbasket. You are taking some risks and have to think about the people around you, in terms of your family, employer, and otherwise. Very few people coming out are public figures. They come out in a much more personal way, sharing it with some friends, fellow employees, family, and the word gets around and is a more gentle experience. Whereas mine was a very big splashy, noisy kind of thing, relatively speaking.

Helena:

I feel much freer and much better with myself. I'm not uptight about what I am. It's just more of what I am. I'm living with someone who is gay. It's a nice life. (Helena)

Terry:

I'm enjoying this more than I have ever as a straight. I feel much freer, much happier, much more at ease with myself and others as a

gay person, and I probably would not give that up. (Terry)

C. Increased self-confidence.

Self-confidence implies a sense of assurance, especially in one's own abilities.

I feel that I've developed a little more self-confidence about my appearance and my ability to talk with people. And I've found that gay people find me attractive, and I never felt that before really. That has increased my self-image some, so I probably act with a little more self-confidence, maybe a little more arrogance even.
(Mitch)

This type of self-confidence is often manifested very visibly in the action stage of coming out. Having explored the gay world through literature and by meeting other gays in the second stage of coming out, the gay now knows her or his ideas and perceptions of reality aren't "abnormal" or "unusual" or "sick." On the contrary, s-he now has positive validation. It's not unusual, then, to see young gays facing high school and university classes giving lectures on what it means being gay, confronting authority figures who are homophobic, or entering libraries asking for, or demanding, that positive gay studies literature be ordered.

But even more important than a belief in one's abilities, self-confidence assumes a fundamental belief in self..."I'm okay" as Thomas Harris of I'M OKAY, YOU'RE OKAY fame (1969) would say. The individual no longer must search others for validation; s-he merely needs to look inside self. The need to mimic straight roles is no longer present, but while the need is gone, the good acting abilities one has achieved remain.

D. Relaxation.

To relax is to give rest to, to lessen concentration, to give time to re-create. It's a time to "mellow out."

For the gay person who's been "in the closet," relaxation means to become free from fear, specifically from the fear of discovery.

When one ordinarily thinks of a closet, one thinks of a stable part of a house. There's no need to build and repair once it's made. It's stable. The imagery of "the closet" reflected in many accounts throughout this work, however, shows a different kind of notion of closet for gays. It's seen as something having to be built over time, usually with bricks. If one of the bricks becomes loose, it immediately has to be repaired. If not, the whole wall will collapse. This is more the image of a dyke or dam. Rev. Troy's language illustrates this beautifully.

...Slowly, brick by brick, it came down. And that's the way it was. I didn't let it happen overnight; it came down brick by brick. And even to this day, I can sense that there are little walls that are still kind of there, you know. It's really hard when you've built so well for so long. You know, Bob, I'm just so absolutely open and known, that you couldn't believe there's a closet wall. Yet, sometimes with certain people, particularly people that I met from my old denomination church, that closet wall is still up...
(Rev. Troy)

And not only do the accounts reflect a building with bricks, they also imply a constant carrying around of a heavy load of bricks needed for reinforcement. This is seen in phrases such as "it felt like a ten-ton weight was dropped off me." To show this profound relaxation available to the gay who's entered Stage IV, I present four informants to tell it their way.

Tony:

Kus: What would you say is the benefits that you personally got out of coming out?

Tony: I am able to be myself. Before I came out I was worried about my parents but ever since they accepted it, I've relaxed more. Secondly I can go where I please, cause Seattle has pretty good gay rights laws, so I can walk the streets and feel proud of what I am. Church has helped me realize that I can still be a Christian and also homo-sexual.

Rev. Eric:

Well, it's a lessening fear and I don't give a damn if people know anymore. If they like it fine and if they don't tough. Obviously I'm still sensitive to rejection and always will be, but there's no fear involved. Either people like me for me or they don't and there isn't one thing I can do about it. I'm not about to change for anyone and lie anymore. So I think there are many benefits to coming out of the closet.

Cimarron:

Kus: Why? What are the benefits of coming out?

Cimarron: For the most part, the people. I live a fairly open life here. In Idaho when I go back to visit my relatives, I go back in the closet. Everybody who has fled the scene goes into that when they return home. An aunt who is in her 50's runs around crazy because she can't have a drink or cigarette. So we all go through the same ritual. When you're out you don't have to put up a facade, you're much more comfortable, not paranoid and you can relax. Don't worry and build up ten thousand walls about this or that happening.

Lonny:

I felt like I had a ten ton weight lifted off me. I find that I'm very relaxed and happy to be around other gays. We always have something in common. Not just that we're gay, but because we're gay we're able to sit down and talk to each other. In straight life there's so many and half of them don't talk to each other. It's like meeting a new family and really getting acceptance and love. And I feel the benefits and it's made me happy.

Finally, to discover if relaxation was a central feature of this process, I asked Tony if a young person should tell the folks. In this

way, I figured, I could learn the role of relaxation. Here's his response.

Kus: Would you advise other people to come out? A young person for example coming to you for advice, asking whether or not they should tell their folks?

Tony: It all depends what type of situation they come from. My grandparents were Roman Catholics but they were aged and able to accept things easier. I would think it was easier if the parents knew, because they don't have to worry about the parents finding out, hiding things from them when they come to visit. That's one reason I've still got this distance between my parents and myself. If they come out I'm not going to hide anything anymore. But at first I was worried about them flying out for a visit and seeing what I'm like...I've got a gay lib or a Seattle Gay News sitting on the table somewhere. I would advise gays to come out and not worry about it.

E. Energy release.

Webster defines "energy" in several ways. The way which most accurately reflects that discussed here is: "potential forces; inherent power; capacity for vigorous action." In the plural, energies refers to using such powers (1960, p. 480).

In the stage of changing conceptions, gays passing as straight use a tremendous amount of energy. As anyone who is paid to act or perform for the public, and this includes professors, flight attendants, clerks, nurses, etc., maintaining a professional "image" is tedious and very energy draining. One fine example of this is an event which happened to me in the 1960's in Ohio. I was running for office of Treasurer of the Student Nurses' Association of Ohio (SNAO). After a full morning and afternoon of attending various caucuses held by nursing students from different cities, I had to escape to my hotel room to exercise my facial

muscles; continual smiling is very painful after a time.

The gay in serious closet passing is "on duty" in his or her acting role 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. The energy used for this acting is now freed during this stage. This newly unbridled energy will be seen in the second part of the chapter in the discussion of the "professional gay." For now, however, it's sufficient to say that such energy is awesome and abundant.

The inner conflict is over and one is suddenly free to be himself. More important, one is no longer at war with himself. The energy which was devoted to denying one's self can now be directed toward building a happy life. (Fisher, 1972, p. 24)

The account of Ethan shows a glimpse into the energy used in closet passing. Dr. Luke's account, on the other hand, shows that if the gay person reaches the stage of acceptance at an early age, this energy drain isn't used in hiding and can, therefore, be used for more important life pursuits.

Ethan:

There's a lot of benefits for coming out. Off the top, you don't have to hide, hide who you are. It takes a tremendous amount of energy to keep a secret from your friends, family, the people you work with, everywhere you go. It's just awful. You have to worry about what you say, behavior, you invent lies and stories about women you're dating or the men, whatever. So when you come out, you have that tremendous amount of space and openness in your relationships. You get so much more love and support and have so much more to give. It's also an affirming of who one is. I don't have to feel guilty or ashamed about who I am. That's a very important process.

Dr. Luke:

I don't want to advocate for the whole gay world, but I think coming out is probably one of the neatest things I ever did, and could do for myself. I'm so happy that I in effect came out when I was in high school. That is I came out to another gay person. That was good for me. It kind of settled a lot of questions pretty early and without having to put a lot of energy into somebody that I wasn't.

F. Guilt reduction.

In Chapter Four, it was seen that guilt is a common feature of the identification stage. Newly armed with the knowledge of gays learned in the cognitive change stage, it's now time for the gay to reduce, and hopefully extinguish, the last vestiges of guilt. But this is not easily accomplished for some persons as is seen in this statement by Dennis Altman, an important Australian gay political theorist:

Because society's attitudes are internalized, homosexuals develop a great sense of guilt about themselves; for myself, however much I try, I doubt if I shall ever totally lose that. (1971, p. 49)

The near-elimination of guilt, or total freedom from guilt, is the hallmark of the stage of acceptance. Without ridding self of guilt, the gay can't achieve what symbolic interactionists call a "healthy self-esteem." In this sense, one can say that guilt reduction is a greater indicator of a person in the acceptance stage than, say, disclosure; one can say "I am gay" and still feel awful about it.

Finally, with the reduction of guilt, one could hypothesize that the special problems produced by guilt, for example, suicidal ideation and depression, alcohol abuse (but not necessarily "alcoholism"), "sexual orientation disturbance," and others would disappear or, at minimum, be greatly reduced. Such would make for many interesting research projects for quantitative researchers.

I would say that the greatest benefit was the ability to take a different stock of myself and rid myself of all these guilt feelings. It made me realize that the best thing to do was try and pursue a happy, gay relationship, rather than try and present myself as something else. (Jon)

G. Honesty and candidness.

According to Webster's Dictionary, honesty is a freedom, a freedom from lying, cheating, stealing, etc. (1960, p. 697). This freedom from lying is also a ridding self of pretense, one of the major elements seen in closet passing. In my accounts, honesty achieved in the stage of acceptance is shown both toward self and others.

For self, honesty is often a function or result of the forced introspection gays undergo in discerning who they are. As such, "honesty" then becomes part of one's self-concept and is reflected in self-esteem statements such as "I'm an honest person."

Kus: Would you invite others to come out?

Trent: Yeah, I would. I think coming out is a whole lot more honest. You've got to be honest with yourself. It reduces the hassles in your life. And when you're accepted by your friends, you can have the same kinds of relationships you had before. You realize it wasn't that big a deal. You can also feel fulfilled sexually if you choose to do so, and that can make you feel a lot more normal. You feel more normal when not running around sulking in your closet. In sum, coming out is to feel honest with yourself.

The idea of self-honesty leads to many questions for further research. Two such questions are presented here.

First, are the "fringe persons" of the gay world in a stage of acceptance? Cimarron presents a personal folk theory which argues that persons who epitomize pre-Stonewall stereotypes as a way of life are not honest with self.

I think honesty is very much a part of acceptance. Most of the folks I know who are in relationships for any length of time are 80% open about their gay lovers. You have to have honesty to do this. If you're hiding and living with mother, this sort of thing, you're always in such a turmoil that you can't be honest. And you can't therefore be a decent human being, because you're not playing

in your own ballpark; you're playing in someone else's. You're the square peg in the round hole. When you do this, you put up parameters on acceptable behavior for others, so you invade their territory. You become dishonest. And this dishonesty gives rise to certain types of behavior which I think is dishonest. For example, if you're all bottled up inside, you become like a broiler. You eventually explode and become the antithesis of what normal middle class suburbia wants. This is the type of person society sees on the street. There's very little honesty in the nelly drag queen¹ on the street. It's an attention-getting device. Basically I would say that they're dishonest because they're not themselves, they're constantly masquerading as something they're not. (Cimarron)

Second, does the self-honesty often discussed as "integrity," which is found in the gay person achieving this acceptance stage, transfer into other areas of life? For example, is the gay salesperson, gay physician, or gay politician likely to be more honest than the straight person with her or his customers, dying patients and constituents? Unlimited research possibilities exist in this area for researchers in many fields.

For others, honesty is manifested by disclosure. Here honesty becomes a freedom from hiding and pretense.

Kus: What kind of benefits would you say coming out has, for you?

Vincent: It has created a better feeling within me. I can be much more open and honest, with my feelings with people who mean a great deal to me. It's just like having that deep, dark secret that nobody knows and you've purposely created a very elaborate camouflage and that only your sex partners know. But nobody else that is involved in your life in any way, shape or form know. It's not being totally honest. It's one thing to be honest with yourself and another thing

¹"Nelly" is an adjective which refers to the pre-Stonewall behavior known as swishy or exaggeratingly feminine. "Drag queen" refers to a man who cross-dresses for any number of reasons. Drag queens may be straights who are transvestites, transgenderals (formerly known as transsexuals) who are very much not gay, or gays who are on the fringe of gay society. The person who cross-dresses only occasionally, such as for a Halloween ball, is not usually considered a "drag queen."

to be honest from the standpoint of other people knowing that you're totally honest. There's that element of deception and dishonesty when those around you, who share a lot of other things, don't know.

Finally, with acceptance and its manifestation in disclosure of sexual orientation, comes the idea that gays are often very candid persons. Candidness, honesty showing itself in straightforwardness, is a characteristic of the self-assured person. This self-assuredness was seen earlier by Mitch when he talked of being more self-confident by coming out. We run into the notion of candidness later.

Openness about being gay is a process of self-disclosure that a person can control; and many gays have a fairly complex understanding of self-disclosure, both in themselves and others. Moreover, they are often more candid and open than nongays.
(Freeman, 1975, p. 28)

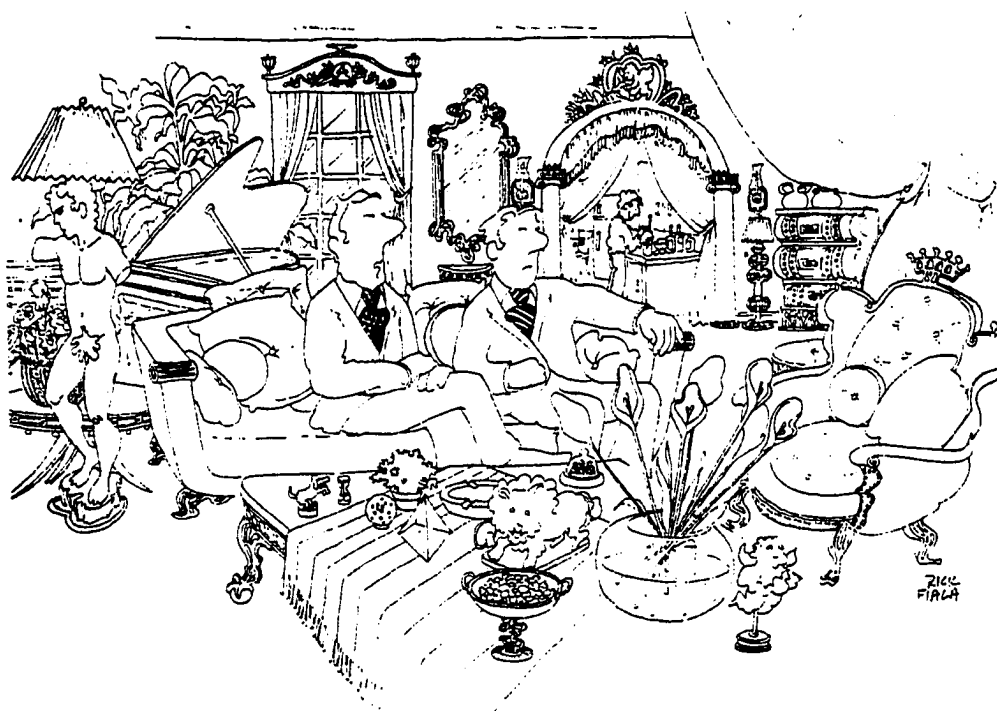
H. Seeing society clearer.

The gay novelist Christopher Isherwood once was quoted as saying,
"As a gay person, you will always have at least one advantage over straights; you will always be on the outside looking in."

I think that you see people in a different light sometimes.
It's made me more aware of a lot of things. You can really tell who your friends are.
(Helena)

And Monty:

Now I'm finding out that gay life isn't that different...you just have to be a little more intelligent. You step out of the old rut of American society and start looking at norms from the outside instead of the inside. You start analyzing what everything is. You're not right in the middle of it. I think that a lot of gay people by coming out, look at things through a clearer light than straight people. You look around and say that's not the way things have to be, that norm isn't exactly right for all people. So you're not in that old wagon wheel rut that your parents and a lot of older gay people were in.
(Monty)



"It's apartments like this that give us a bad name."

In beginning to examine this idea of seeing society clearer, I came across many ideas and concepts which lead to an infinite number of research questions for the future. Many of these questions lie outside the realm of sociology, and especially outside the scope of this study, and they often border on the mystical. Examining this notion was for me, then, akin to opening a box and having a host of uncontrolled forces unleashed.

In this section, then, I will merely introduce the reader to some of the avenues I explored in looking at "seeing society clearer," offer an example or two from my informants' accounts or the literature, and finally raise a research question or two. Topics included here are forced introspection, sensitivity, creativity, critical ability, and camp.

1. Forced introspection.

Back in an earlier chapter, it was noted that the process the gay must go through in recognizing sexual orientation is unique. Marty refers to this as forced introspection.

I wouldn't want to be straight even if it were possible. I think being gay has added a valuable perspective to my life. I've learned a lot about myself through sort of a forced introspective process and analysis. Certainly when you're coming out and gaining values you know the majority of society does not accept, it makes you think about them very seriously. Being gay is the only minority status I've experienced and I consider it valid. As a result, it has given me insight into the oppression that peoples are exposed to in this society. And that's very valuable. (Marty)

Is this introspective analysis an ingredient of seeing society clearer?
Is it part of Isherwood's notion of seeing society clearer?

2. Sensitivity.

I began finding informants casually mentioning a special kind of "gay sensitivity." The concept kept showing up in both fictional and non-fictional writings. I saw cartoons about it. Was this part of seeing society clearer?

To answer this, I devised a sensitivity test which is seen in Appendix F. This, I found, didn't lead me very far. What it turned up was that some lesbians thought all women were more sensitive than all men based on their socialization as females. Some gay men believed all gays were more sensitive than all straights. The one item which was universally held by both men and women informants, however, was that the category "straight men" fell at the bottom of the list. I received some information which could help explain "seeing society clearer." Two examples are provided by Dr. Luke and Ethan.

Dr. Luke:

I think there is such a thing as a special gay sensitivity. I think it comes from gay sex, relationships and homosexuality being forbidden areas in the society. Gay kids probably start being very aware of what they can say and can't say to people. So they're more aware of people. They probably start monitoring people pretty closely because of this great secret they have. I think this gives rise to what is meant by a gay sensitivity which non-gays never develop as they don't go through this process.

Ethan:

Kus: How do you think gay men got to be more sensitive than straight men?

Ethan: I think it might be because they've had to deal with something that is very difficult, something that does cause a lot of self-searching and thinking and feeling and so on that a straight person doesn't have to deal with. It's such an important part of one's life and there's a long period of guilt, self-contempt, and other things. It's kind of like going



"I know we're supposed to be more sensitive, but this is ridiculous."

through a trial or whatever you want to call it that
straights miss completely. (Ethan)

3. Creativity.

Another concept I kept running across was the notion of a special "creativity" in gay men. For reasons unknown to me, the idea of lesbians having a peculiar creative (or productive/inventive) nature isn't in the literature nor in gay folk belief.

No method has been found to calibrate creativity or measure the influence of homosexuality on a person's life, so the connection between homosexuality and creativity is still a mystery. Still, so many of the major figures in literature, music, painting, philosophy, dance, the theater, etc., are widely considered to be or have been homosexual that it is difficult not to draw the conclusion that homosexuals are disproportionately represented in the arts. (Fisher, 1972, p. 218)

Some writers flatly reject that gay men are more creative than other social categories. Others say they are. Some say gay men are more creative than others because of their oppression which is internalized and seen in guilt, shame, etc.

Whatever the answer may be, and I believe the "final truth" is not yet in, is beyond this study. However, I leave the reader with a couple of questions which are broad enough to engage many researchers from many disciplines in further research for years to come.

First, if a special creativity doesn't in fact exist, why are so many pages of so many books devoted to saying it does or does not exist?

Second, if it does exist, and if "oppression" as a minority is given as its reason for being, why are not blacks, Native Americans, Chicanos, etc. noted for this special "creativity?"

Third, why are not lesbians included as possessors of this special

resource?

Fourth, is it possible that the answer to "Are gay men more creative than others?" is to be found in examining the more mundane aspects of life rather than looking at famous gay artists and musicians and playwrights? Is the answer to be found in simple areas of life such as clothing style, house decorations, cooking styles, making crafts? Is the commonly held idea that gays are invited into low rent districts of urban areas to improve the area artistically so rents can go up through urban renewal a valid observation?

The list goes on and on. But what, the reader may be legitimately thinking at this point, does creativity have to do with seeing society clearer or the stage of acceptance? A fair question, and one which calls for a refocusing.

"Seeing society clearer" is a common feature of acceptance. Creativity is perhaps part of this. In a Western I read long ago, a cowboy's wife had gone away from the cabin for a few days. He looked into his kitchen cupboard and saw only isolated items. His remark went something like this: "I look into the cupboard and see only a bunch of things. My wife can look in the same cupboard and see a banquet." The theory here is that if a person is truly able to "see society clearer" as many of my informants believe, s-he will then be able to put together the symbols (words) and artifacts (things) of the society in ways novel or creative.

4. Critical sense.

Does a forced introspection process lead gays to be special critics of society? Do you remember the accounts of Trent and Mike saying the

coming out process led them to wonder if others had been telling the truth about a lot of things while saying lies about gays?

The independence many gays achieve by choosing to live by their own chosen values not only provides them with a measure of social autonomy that makes for psychological health, but it also contributes to society, for gays thus acquire a keen critical sense. They have learned about the emperor's new clothes...and don't hesitate to say so. (Woods, 1978, pp. 38-39)

One of the early pre-Stonewall, pre-gay liberation movement "homophile" societies was called the Mattachine Society.

Mattachines were medieval court jesters who told the truth to kings while hiding behind masks. The name's symbolic importance should not be underestimated. (Humphreys, 1972, p. 52)

A final word is given by Woods, a Dominican priest. This account clearly shows why earlier I mentioned that the concept of "seeing society clearer" unleashed a host of forces bordering on the mystical. The reader is cautioned here about the word "prophet." In Catholic terminology, a prophet is not a fortune-teller or seer of the future. Rather, the "prophetic person" is one who tells "truth" which others might not grasp until future times. Thus, "Gay sex is not morally wrong intrinsically" is considered a prophetic statement from the point of view of the gay in Stage III or IV of the coming out process.

...the gay world is a microcosm of the straight world, a kind of model, accentuating both its positive and negative characteristics. As such, the gay world can provide a valuable contribution to the larger society - reflecting its image back, with commentary. Socially, the gay world has a critical capacity which is all too frequently wasted; that of being a magnifying mirror held before society, particularly with respect to its most often uncritical attitude toward sexuality.

In both the critical capacity and its failure, gay men and women share a triple vocation: that of the artist, the mystic and the prophet. The distinct touch of gayness involved focuses this three-fold sensitivity to aesthetic value, justice and celebration into the image of society's mime: the clown. It begins with the ability to see what others do not see, and the will to create through suffering. (Woods, 1978, p. 143)

5. Camp.

Earlier I mentioned that the gay person begins to enter a gay "reality" in Stage II of the coming out process. Why didn't I merely say "the gay is ready to enter a gay community or world?" Why "reality"? Well, a special reality implies another dimension as opposed to a geographic area. And nowhere is this "gay reality" seen more clearly, yet mysteriously, than in the notion of "camp."

To understand "camp" fully would require many books written from many perspectives. However, I present just a few observations on this phenomenon to give the reader a glimpse into a dimension faced by gays who interact in gay settings.

First, camp originally meant a special type of gay humor which was mocking of femininity, masculinity, homosexuality and gays, fashion, etc. (Hunt, 1977, p. 119). Later, in the mid-1960's camp became a kind of art as well as a type of behavior.

Second, there are so many forms of camp that in actuality the concept "camp" is a catch-all phrase embodying a whole array of very different kind of actions. [One example is seen in Steinberg's dialog on p. 201.]

Third, camp may be highly subtle or very outrageous. An example of the former is the pre-introductory statement of Chapter 7. When I asked Fabian, the most closeted of my 31 informants, if he had anything else to say while still on tape, he replied, "Hi Mom! Hi Dad!" My gay reader committee members laughed immediately upon seeing this; my straight readers didn't see the humor of it. Examples of camp as outrageous can be seen

in other works.¹

Fourth, one either "gets it" or "doesn't get it." Chances are likely that the gay person, even those who are just entering a gay setting, will "get it" more often than straights. From my experience in Montana, it would seem that the ability to "get it" isn't necessarily a function of learning from others nor experience with other gays. This, of course, leads to interesting research questions concerning "seeing society clearer."

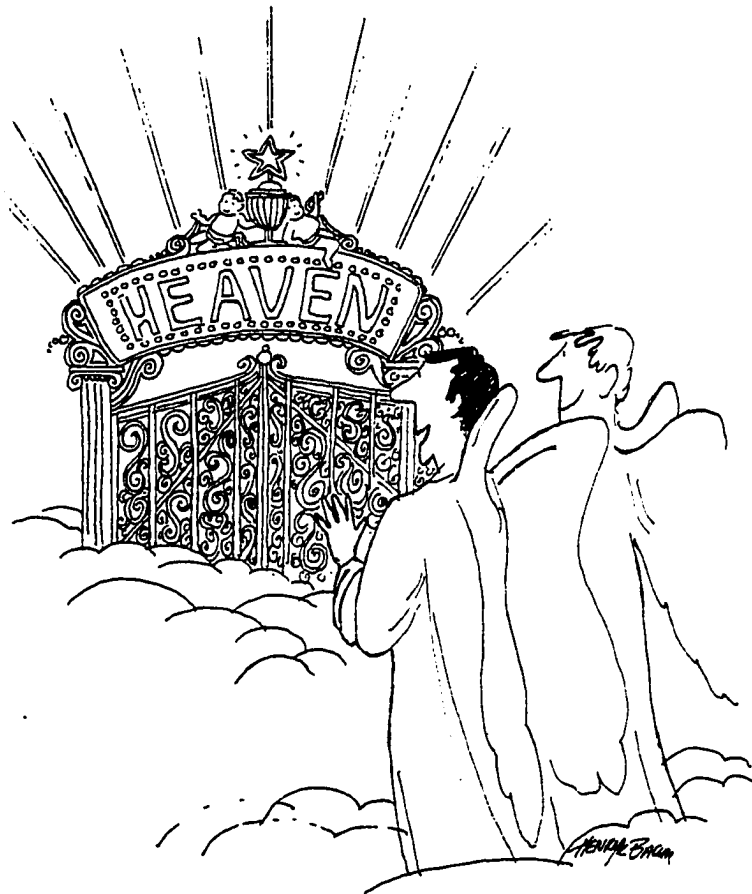
Fifth, some persons are considered "naturally campy" and loved in the gay community. Such a person is Bette Davis.

The place: a movie house in Chicago. Bette Davis is on the screen - aging, wrinkled, popeyed. She's playing the part of a mean old woman, and doing it with such exaggeration, such glaring, fidgeting, and face twitching, that you would expect people to walk out. But the audience, consisting mostly of gay men, loves it. They howl with laughter, they roar with delight. There are some straight people in the audience and they can't figure out what's going on. What the gays are enjoying so much is a mystery to them, and one straight whispers to another, "Do they know something we don't know?"

(Hunt, 1977, p. 111)

Sixth, certain forms of camp can be very frightening for gays experiencing them for the first time. Because certain camp "pros" are able to zero in on one's Achille's heel, and because this kind of camp happens so rapidly and is so devastatingly razor-sharp and cutting, the camp "pro" becomes an object of fear. S-he is the type of person one is

¹Two discussions highlighting some of the intrigue of "outrageous" forms of camp are: Esther Newton. MOTHER CAMP: FEMALE IMPERSONATORS IN AMERICA. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972; and Kenneth E. Read. OTHER VOICES: THE STYLE OF A MALE HOMOSEXUAL TAVERN. Novato, CA: Chandler and Sharp Pub., 1980. Pay special attention to the two chapters "Halls of mirrors" which pinpoint seeing society in a different way.



"Now that's Camp!"

reluctant to have as an enemy.

Finally, the forms of camp which mock the opposite-sex are often considered by many gays, especially the liberationists, to be sexist, very passé, and, in fact, counterproductive to gay liberation.

Camp itself may soon be conquered by gay liberation, in the sense of being made unnecessary and old-fashioned. Camp is a way of making fun of oneself for being homosexual, but gay militants say there's nothing to make fun of, that homosexuals can and should be self-respecting. Camp is also a way of thumbing one's nose at the straight world, but gay militants say thumbing one's nose isn't good enough; fighting for homosexual rights in the courts, the streets, and the news media is vastly more important. As a result, many younger gays, who grew up and came out after the gay liberation movement got under way, either are uninterested in camp or actively disapprove of it, much as today's blacks disapprove of "Uncle Tom" behavior toward whites.

(Hunt, 1977, pp. 121-122)

For a brilliant example of camp humor, the reader is asked to read Mort Crowley's THE BOYS IN THE BAND.

To sum up this section on "seeing society clearer," we note that this notion raises many questions for further research.

J. Health.

To begin to quote the writers in sociology, psychology and psychiatry who point out the improved health gained by achieving self-acceptance would entail the virtual repeating of all the works quoted and mentioned earlier in this work. Therefore, to simplify matters, I merely mention that a hallmark of the acceptance stage is an improvement in mental health and physical health. The depression, ulcers, colitis, etc. are now gone or greatly reduced. From a health perspective, then, coming out can lead to a "wellness" not seen in the first two stages of the coming out process.

II. GETTING ON WITH IT - ACTION

With the achievement of acceptance come various types of action on the gay person's part. The action may be highly visible as in the action of disclosure, or it may be only visible to self, such as saying a private prayer of thanksgiving. Further, action may be attributed to "coming out" or not recognized by the actor as a manifestation of the process.

In this section, we take a look at just a few actions which are taken by gays achieving acceptance. These include disclosure, talking gay, sharing secrets, spotting other gays, developing social consciousness, occupational considerations and friendship circle changes and religious action. We end with a brief look at the future. We end with a summary and an "epilogue" from Lance.

A. Disclosure.

As we saw in Chapter Three, many people confuse "coming out" with disclosure or saying "I am gay." We've seen, however, that the process is much more complicated than that.

Disclosure, although commonly thought of as the logical extension of the acceptance stage, isn't always necessary. The gay with a healthy self-esteem might find self in life situations where disclosure is unnecessary and inappropriate. Such an example might be a lesbian cloistered nun or a gay American working with Mother Theresa of Calcutta.

At any rate, one example of disclosure, telling the family, is dealt with in depth in Chapter Seven.

B. Talking gay.

A common action and benefit of being open about sexual orientation is being able to "talk gay." A straight man and his gay friend might be walking down the street. The straight may say, "Wow, look at that beautiful woman" while the gay may say, "I love the ass on that guy!" It is also known that a gay and straight of opposite sexes often "compare notes" about men and/or women.

In my straight role, I couldn't use the word 'gay' in referring to myself or my friends, and I couldn't say certain things that I would have liked to say. For example, in my straight role, I couldn't say, "Look, that guy over there on the corner is cute." But in my gay role, I can say anything I want, just about. (Terry)

C. Sharing secrets.

Disclosure can often lead both straights and other gays to being confiding in the open gay and sharing secret aspects of their lives. This is a phenomenon frequently seen in the nudist movement. Should a person learn one is a nudist, s-he often feels that telling the nudist sexual things is okay.

As we'll see in Chapter Seven, the sharing secrets phenomenon works both ways. In other words, a person who's very close to the closet gay may begin sharing intimate details of his or her life. The gay then shares her or his secret identity.

...Now that I've told my friends, they've broken down and told me a few things they never would have told me. (Kus: Such as?) They told me things one does in private and things from the past. For example I have a straight friend who has a girl friend; they're very close. He admitted to me that when she's not around, he jacks off in private. He would never have admitted that to anyone at all, until I admitted that I was gay. She said that when she was a senior in high school she had an abortion. Little things like that come out.

D. Spotting other gays.

Folk theory has it that "it takes one to know one." Based on this theory, straights and many gays believe gays have some kind of built-in radar to find other gays. This is both true and false.

In many instances, based on mistaken notions of what gays are like, straight men who are effeminate and straight women who are masculine are often pegged as gay erroneously. Likewise the masculine gay man and feminine lesbian are often pegged as straight.

On the other hand, many gays are able to cut through stereotypes and, through leading questions, body language, etc., learn who is and isn't gay. Some gays report they have a remarkable ability to do this, while others report they have very little success in doing so. One very good friend of mine claims his cat is an expert on determining which men are gay and which are straight!

The old saying is it takes one to know one. I think I could probably recognize a gay person much quicker than a straight person could. This is partly because most straight people have a stereotype vision of what a gay person is suppose to look like. I used to do this when I was younger too, but after meeting so many gays, I think I have less trouble picking them out. (Jon)

E. Developing social consciousness.

Upon entering the gay community, one learns very,very quickly that some things are highly taboo. This in turn leads the gay person to begin changing behavior and develop a new set of verbal and non-verbal actions in life.

At a social affair I attended a couple of years ago, for example, a middle-aged lesbian asked a gay man a question about who thought something

up. She said, "Was it the men or the girls?" Two other gay men were standing nearby. They immediately turned around and, with the gay man to whom the question was directed, said loudly in unison, "Women." Everybody cracked up. The point was driven home, though, that words such as "girl" or "boy" or "chairman" are taboo; "woman" or "man" or "chairperson" are okay.

This social consciousness extends beyond word usage. One learns not to cross picket lines, not to vacation in states which haven't passed the Equal Rights Amendment, not to buy any citrus product from Florida, etc. One learns, on the positive side, to call the gay community newspaper to find out which travel agent advertises in the newspaper before buying a plane ticket or to learn which political candidates are pro-gay civil rights before going to the polls.

Kus: Paris, can you tell me anything about the benefits that you personally have had in coming out?

Paris: The people that I got to know and have become close friends with are closer in terms both of emotional support and commonalities than former straight friends. It's more fun. It's not a club, it's really a nice feeling of comradeship. It's a biggie for me to be involved since coming out. I've met more people who have put me in touch with other issues on a general scope in terms of social consciousness. There's definite discrimination. It's easy growing up in an upper middle class suburb in terms of removing yourself from that and not experiencing that. It gives you a false sense of what the world is all about. I guess as a benefit I feel much more in touch with what life's really about in terms of its diversity and goods and bads and ups and downs. You know the things that have to happen to change. I never got that from the people I used to hang around with. It's certainly been easier for me to be aware since I've come out.

F. Occupational considerations.

The coming out process is often so profound for the individual

that it leads to certain occupational choices and observable actions. This section deals with some of these while raising some very interesting questions for further research. Topics included are: the "professional gay," the gay professional, service occupations, and overachieving.

1. The "professional gay."

Humphreys suggests that by coming out, the gay person often becomes a crusader in a new cause.

...In converting his stigma, the oppressed person does not merely exchange his social marginality for political marginality, although that is one interpretation the socially dominant segments of society would like to place upon the process. Rather, he emerges from a stigmatized cocoon as a transformed creature, one characterized by the spreading of political wings. At some point in the process, the politicized "deviant" gains a new identity, an heroic self-image as crusader in a political cause. (Humphreys, 1972, p. 142)

It was mentioned earlier in this chapter that there's a tremendous energy release experienced by persons gaining acceptance. This energy, unleashed when the person no longer has to hide, often manifests itself in a flurry of activity.

In Montana, for example, many students of mine accepted themselves as gay at about the same time. They formed a group called Lambda¹ to encourage gay awareness on campus and off. Within a matter of a few weeks, they found themselves having libraries order gay literature, getting book-



¹The symbol on the left is lower-case lambda, the 11th letter of the Greek alphabet. It corresponds to our letter "L" as in "liberation." This ancient symbol, used by the Spartans on their shields in battle, was adopted by the Gay Activists Alliance after Stonewall and has since become a major symbol of gay liberation. In chemistry and physics, lambda symbolizes "...a complete exchange of energy - that moment or span of time to witness absolute activity." (Teal, 1971, p. 223)

stores to set up Gay Studies sections, printing a newsletter, giving panels to high school and university classes, "liberating" straight dancing places by dancing with same-sex partners, etc. Many of them had a very difficult time with their traditional academic courses during this period. It was very much like an "explosion of freedom."

Usually this period of being a "professional gay" is temporary, but often it can lead to lifelong occupational choices. Mitch became a gay community organizer, Helen joined a lesbian farm commune in Montana, and Mark became a national gay leader. Here's an example of a "professional gay" person.

That period of accelerated gay consciousness raising swung the pendulum of my social posture from that of "Uncle Bruce,"¹ who knew his place and tried to survive by keeping a low profile, to that of "Militant Martin," who wouldn't go anywhere without his literal and figurative button: "How dare you presume I'm heterosexual?" I learned the exhilaration of protest through activism. I joined my gay sisters and brothers in rallies, gay pride parades and demonstrations, planning sessions for "zaps,"² and endless philosophical raps on sexism, heterosexism and homophobia. I spent nights on the hot line, offering support, advice, or just a sympathetic ear to gay brothers and sisters isolated by fear, geography or both. Long-distance calls came from towns I'd never heard of and my heart went out to those with no access to the kind of gay support group I was enjoying. (Rochlin, 1979, p. 165)

2. The gay professional.

As one mellows from the initial burst of freedom, one can then concentrate on life goals, occupational preparation being a prime one. The gay may then devote just part of his or her time to gay community projects,

^{1,2}The origins of using "Bruce" as a gay name are, like so many other gay words, lost in history. I know of at least one gay community center, though, which has a computer named Bruce. A "zap" is a political confrontation done by gays to homophobic authority figures. Zaps were especially popular in the early days of the present gay movement.

or s-he may use his or her occupation primarily for and in the gay community. In my sample, Fabian was the only one out of the 31 informants who didn't give at least some time for the "gay cause." Revs. Eric and Troy channeled their ministries into the gay community full-time, Carol, Dr. Luke and Ethan devoted their counseling skills to the gay community, etc. Here's an example of going from a "professional gay" to a "gay professional."

Once, during a convention of the American Psychological Association, while enjoying the personal as well as political gratification of dancing with another man in the ballroom of the super-straight convention hotel, a gay colleague suggested I really ought to lower my consciousness a bit. As valid as that observation may have been on the surface, I wasn't quite ready for moderation. I'd trudged the long way from homosexual to gay, then leapt from gay to exuberant. The exuberance was nourishment for a long-starved spirit. It was the magic key that could open the doors to authentic selfhood. It was a rechanneling of misdirected rage, the elusive ingredient my therapist and I sensed was missing from my years of psychotherapy, but that neither of us had been able to identify correctly in those pre-Stonewall days. I was eventually to "lower my consciousness" in moving from the position of professional gay to the more integrated gay professional, but I look upon that period of heightened awareness and involvement, insistent irreverence and deliberately outrageous insolence with joy, gratitude and love for those with whom I shared it, those who are still to discover it and those experiencing its sweet intoxication at this very moment. (Rochlin, 1979, pp. 165-166)

3. Service.

Gays, throughout history, have found themselves in every occupation from pope to peanut farmer, from shaman to surgeon. However, it has been raised by some writers that gays often enter service professions in over-representative proportions.

...what has remained relatively unnoticed is the attraction of many homosexuals to service roles, where they have been particularly successful. Many homosexuals find particular satisfaction in such positions as teachers, social workers, hospital orderlies, student counselors, psychologists, clergymen - in

fact, in any form of occupation where they can be of direct service to their fellow humans. (McNeill, 1978, pp. 141-142)

This raises interesting future-research questions here. Is this a manifestation of the "wounded healer" concept? Do those who come out of an oppressive background have more empathy for the suffering?

McNeill goes on to say,

...the cybernetic revolution has progressively eliminated the amount of hard work with material things necessary for the survival and prosperity of the community. In its place there is a growing demand for more and more people who are able to commit themselves to the type of service to their fellow humans which demand greater sensitivity and human concern. Traditionally, however, the service roles in the community - such as the care of the young and the aged, education, nursing, and social work in general - have been seen as primarily feminine roles, not fit occupations for the true male. As Jung observed, frequently the homosexual is "surprisingly gifted as a teacher because of his almost feminine insight and tact." Thielicke, in turn, speaks of the homosexual as frequently gifted with a remarkable "pedagogical eros, a heightened sense of empathy." (1976, p. 141)

Are gays better teachers? Is the notion of "seeing society clearer" operating here? Is one's ability to act, learned in passing, operating here? The list goes on.

Kus: Eric, you are spending you life helping other people. You seem very sensitive, and very turned on to helping people. Do you think that being gay and growing up in the times that you did, had anything to do with your concern of helping people?

Rev. Eric: Oh, yes. You know, when you've been an underdog all your life, you're aware when others are down. When one knows rejection, even if hidden, there is a great need for acceptance. I think most people who are in the "helping game" have this need for acceptance. It's a way of saying, I have meaning to you, I'm useful to you. I think anyone in the helping game should be aware of these motives.

4. Overachieving.

Often research questions come out of putting isolated findings

together as in a puzzle. Here's an example.

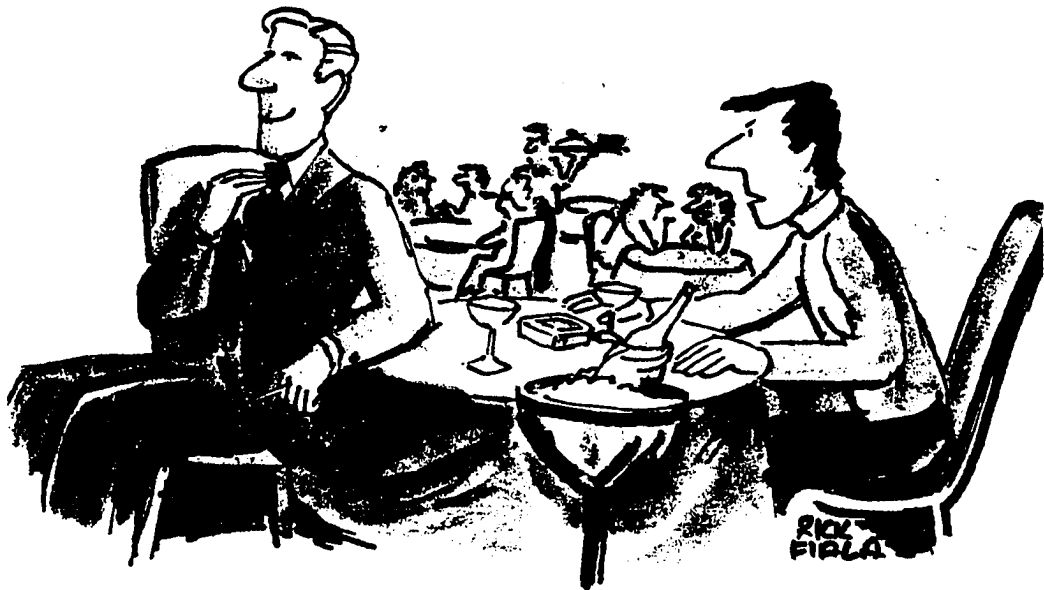
Many of the accounts in this work said things like, "In order to make it as a gay, you have to be on top" or "you have to be better than the others." We also saw "The Best Little Boy In the World" syndrome, where overachieving was a characteristic. We also saw the Rubyfruit Jungle syndrome where females engaged in the competitive and assertive types of behavior which are useful in the business world. I've also found many novels having overachieving gay characters.¹ I also found a marketing advertisement which said that the gay market "...according to BUSINESS WEEK, controls 19% of the disposable income in this country." (CHRISTOPHER STREET, May, 1980, p. 2).

Putting this all together, we can ask many questions. Does going through the coming out process produce a disproportionate number of over-achievers? How about workaholism? Is this an unforeseen consequence of coming out? Here's one example of being gay leading to "raising sights" in occupational choice.

One of the reasons that I chose medicine is because I knew that it would be kind of tough to be gay in this society. I wanted a powerful position to be gay in. I was set for one of the other helping professions, like pharmacy. I think coming out helped me raise my sights.

Dr. Luke further argues, however, that he knows other gays who felt "unworthy" to enter professions such as medicine, religion, etc.

¹For a rather thorough example of such "overachievement", the reader is invited to read the famous Peter and Charlie trilogy by Gordon Merrick. Included in this trilogy are: THE LORD WON'T MIND (1970); ONE FOR THE GODS (1971); and FORTH INTO LIGHT (1974). All are published by Avon Books in New York.



"Must you always look as though you're available at fine stores everywhere?"

G. Friendship circles.

Another important action of the coming out process is choosing friends. I will touch briefly on some areas of this such as a need for gay friends, changing ratios of straight and gay friends, decisions to abandon all straight friends, and deliberately seeking out straight friends.

1. Needing gay friends.

It's argued by many gays in this stage of the coming out process that they need gay friends to be happy and to meet potential lovers.

You can have really good friendships in the straight world but if you're gay, you really need some gay friends, to understand that part of you. It offers you the opportunity to form lover relationships.
(Dr. Luke)

2. Comfort.

One concept used to describe getting through the coming out process is "home." Sr. Theresa, for example, talks about acceptance as "sort of like coming home." Home is a comfortable place, a place one can let his or her hair down and kick off the shoes. This often leads to a changing ratio of straight to gay friends; the number of straight friends tends to stabilize while the number of gay friends increases.

Xavier:

Kus: It seems as though a lot of gay people, as part of their coming out process, develop more and more gay friends and less and less straight friends over time. Do you have any

Xavier cont:

reasons why that might happen?

Xavier: I think you must feel more comfortable. Maybe it has something to do with your job life. There is also an artistic, creative tendency among gays. So you find a lot of creative, exciting people you don't find in the straight world.

It wasn't that I didn't want to be with straights anymore. It was that I preferred to be with gay people, because with them I can totally be myself. If I wanted to be camp, or talk about my latest sexual explitation, I could. Whereas with straight friends, it's the same old boring bullshit I've heard over and over again and still hear at work. So I have very little to do with them. Oh I still have a couple of straight fiends here and from college in Missoula. (Bob)

3. Extremism.

Some gays make a conscious decision to completely cut straights out of their lives on a friendship level. The two major categories which come to mind are the lesbian separatists and gay (male) nationalists. Other gays find they have been so hurt that they cut off straights from their lives to avoid any further possible hurt. In large cities, this can easily be accomplished not merely on a friendship level, but one can be found to have a gay physician, dentist, lawyer, barber, etc. Another example of isolationism is to be found in gay communal living.¹

Kus: Do you have many straight friends?

Mike: No. I avoid them like the plague.

Kus: Why is that?

¹For one example of such a communal experience, see The 25 to 6 Baking and Trucking Society. GREAT GAY IN THE MORNING. New York: Times Change Press, 1972

Mike: I don't think that in the U.S. today that works too well. My other half, roommate, whatever is from Canada. I went to many parties up there and straight and gay people got along together beautifully. But in the U.S. it always ends up in a terrible fight...or at least it has for me. I don't want that so I just quit.

This type of total isolation from straights has many political, and possibly mental health consequences. As we saw earlier, voters were often led to vote for pro-gay bills because they had gay friends and relatives. The isolated gay, on the other hand, must enter the electorate as a stranger. A mental health aspect is seen in this account.

Real and continuous contact with both gay and straight people is necessary for effective living in a world that is neither wholly straight nor gay. Isolation means loneliness and one or another form of estrangement, which is a way of saying incomplete development as a human person. The "healthy homosexual" man or woman can be shown to have a gay support group as well as heterosexual friends and acquaintances. The loner as well as the "heterophobe" is usually headed for problems. (Woods, 1978, p. 41)

4. Balancing.

Many gays, when they realize they are beginning to isolate themselves from straight society, make a deliberate and conscious effort to develop a more balanced, or mixed, set of friends. This was especially true in Montana where the total number of gays knowing each other comprised a small number; plain boredom developed.

Helena:

I see my straight circle of friends increasing quite a bit. Some of the gay people are too busy or something. They don't have it together and I'd rather not hang around with them. They're flying around all the time and being promiscuous. (Helena)

Monty:

I found that I wasn't associating with the straights. When I was off from work I was immersed in the gay culture. I wasn't meeting any straights. I found that I wasn't caring about straights

anymore. I now find myself branching out. The walls between straight and gay are falling down for me now. I'm much happier and balanced with both straight and gay friends. Walls aren't good between people. (Monty)

Mitch:

I hope to increase all of my friends. I would have gone crazy long ago I think if it weren't for the straight friends I had from before coming out and continue to have. I've met some very good straight friends from the gay studies class and they provide a good relief for me from gay friends.

H. Religious action.

The last area I examine in any depth is religious action. Early on in the study, I realized that one source of guilt experienced in the first two stages of coming out was attributed to the religious beliefs held in childhood by the gay person. Therefore, I asked "religious preference" at age 13 and "current religious affiliation." Before telling my findings, though, it should be pointed out here that Washington State, where 25 out of 31 informants lived, has the lowest church membership (32-33%) of any state in the nation (Ruppert in THE SEATTLE TIMES, February 1, 1980, p. A16).

Due to the nature of my sample, incidences cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, certain patterns were uncovered which can be presented and serve as the basis for further research. Patterns include staying in one's religion while modifying beliefs, changing from within, changing religions, exploring options, giving up church, and a note on a gay spirituality.

1. Staying in and modifying beliefs.

Many gays remain in their churches into adulthood yet modify some of the beliefs of the traditional church teaching. This is more easily

accomplished in non-fundamentalist churches such as Roman Catholic and Protestant Episcopal where the beliefs of the people and clergy are often light-years away from the teachings of the Vatican or Canterbury.

The beliefs most often changed are those dealing with sexual morality and male-female traditional roles. I found no gays in Stage IV who would agree with the statement, "wives should be subservient to their husbands."

Xavier:

Neither myself nor my family, though we're Catholic, practice religion routinely. When I was growing up and before coming out, I wasn't going to church every Sunday. There was nothing said about religion when my parents were told I was gay. Not too long ago I was compelled to the Catholic Church. I think it was one of my many moods. A friend of mine suggested that I talk to the priest in my parish because he slept with him. So I had a nice long talk with him and got back into the good graces of the church. For awhile it made me feel better. Then I realized that it didn't make any difference whether the priest sanctioned what I was doing or not. In the Catholic religion as the sacraments are so important, I catch myself feeling that I got to do this and this so at death I can receive this. I'm putting it off until my life style slows down, maybe until 50. I'll get back in the church. It's a hypocritical thing, but that's how I feel so that's what I'm planning on doing. I'm not worrying about the church. How I feel about God is an individual thing. I don't need the church to feel the way I do. I'll wait and get back into the church...that's what my family did so I'll follow suit with them.

Dr. Luke:

In general, the people I know and have talked to usually have a modification of their beliefs unless they're strong and in an extremely liberal church to begin with. I know that Evangelicals Concerned and the Metropolitan Community Church who obviously have some modification of their beliefs, are still pretty fundamentalist. The gay people I know who come out, usually reject religion or become or convert to a more liberal religion, one where there's more acceptance. They may become more liberal in their own religious tradition. This is especially true of Roman Catholics I know. Roman Catholics are often very angry at the church. If they're not too angry they can find a place in Catholicism. It's such a diverse religion, that they can find the right kind of priests and associates. In the Roman Catholic Church official policies are often different from what the people believe, so it's easy to stay if you want.

2. Changing from within.

Gays who remain church persons often become crusaders for change in the official belief systems of the church. Groups such as Dignity (for Catholics) and Integrity (for Protestant Episcopalians) are examples. These groups provide not only spiritual and social benefits for their members, but they also provide literature, lectures and workshops for the church leaders and laity.

3. Changing religions or churches.

For the gay person born into a fundamentalist church, the static belief system appears too great to allow for the possibility of change or acceptance. Therefore, s-he may change to a more liberal tradition or enter a gay-oriented church such as Metropolitan Community Church or American Orthodox.

Kus: Do you think that giving up of one's religion is part of the coming out process for many gay people that you know:

Jon: No. Because of my involvement with Metropolitan Community Church I think a lot of the gay people I know have been able to accept themselves and come out as I was. This was not by rejecting religion, but by finding it, and finding that a gay life style is acceptable. I think there is a lot of religious rejection by gays. But I don't think that coming out has anything to do with rejection of religion. A lot of the people I know go to M.C.C. and have religious backgrounds.

4. Exploring options.

Throughout this work, we've seen that due to the introspective process of coming out and changing conceptions, gays frequently begin questioning all they've been previously taught to weed out the "dubious truths"

which may have been fed to them. In the accounts of Trent, for example, we saw that there was a developing interest in studying comparative religions. Rita is looking into religions to find one dealing with both a female and gay spirituality. Others report looking for personal levels of beliefs which would fit into their lives.

5. Giving up church.

Bell and Weinberg (1978, pp. 149-154) found that there is a tendency for gays to attend church less than straights. This led me to wonder if this led to an abandonment or rejection of religious belief. To my surprise, it didn't. Even Vincent, who defined himself as an atheist, held onto many beliefs learned in his previous fundamentalist religion.

Ethan:

Kus: How about changes in religious belief? Do you think that's a part of coming out for many people?

Ethan: I don't think so. I think there might be some people who turn away from religion because religions have negative views of homosexuality. I think though that because religious beliefs are so deep, that the basic belief would probably still be there, even though the outward form, like withdrawal from church might occur.

Cimarron:

Kus: Do you feel that abandoning religion may be part of the coming out process?

Cimarron: I don't think "abandoning" is the right word. I would say that there are changes one goes through for persons in very fundamentalist churches. I have several friends from my former church, RLDS, who try to stay in and be gay. I think it's impossible. So often gay people have to leave the formal religion behind. But the basics, the gay Christian ethic behind religious beliefs is carried with the person. A lot of the values and ideals stick with you even if you care less about who's going to be the next prophet in the church. I won't knock those still in fundamentalist churches. Maybe they're right.

Cimarron cont:

But I'm not going to worry about it. My God is one of love and mercy. Their God is one of fear and damnation. So I guess we'll just have to wait to see which of us is right when we leave this world.

6. A note about a gay spirituality.

An area which is only beginning to be explored is the possibility of a special "gay spirituality." This concept makes certain assumptions. First, all humans have a spiritual life whether they're "into religion" or not. Second, it assumes that spirituality is manifested in actions such as helping a neighbor, giving time to others, telling a joke to make someone happy.

The evident presence of self-affirmation, compassion and thankful celebration in the gay community, even though frequently disguised, indicates to me not only the basic health there, but also the radical religious character latent in gay experience. (Woods, 1978, p. 40)

Looked at in this way, one wonders if the coming out process produces special spiritual insights which gays can share with others. Some writers suggest this can happen.

The homosexual community, once again granted that they were accepted and respected in the human community at large, have, perhaps, a very special and irreplaceable task to play in freeing the male community from this one-sided emphasis on violent characteristics. Because they may have fortuitously escaped the negative influence of the prevailing male identity image, they are potentially free from the psychological need to establish their male identity by means of violence. (McNeill, 1978, p. 140)

I. Other.

The action seen in Stage IV of the coming out process is diffuse. Not included in the examples above are the working in the gay community



on special projects, working for the gay liberation movements, and other common actions.

It is sufficient to say here that stage IV, lasting for the rest of the gay's life, is a powerful part of the coming out process.

J. The Future.

Assuming that there's not a Hitler-like holocaust conducted against gays in America, the coming out process will probably be speeded up. There is, indeed, evidence of this in larger progressive cities such as Seattle.

Kus: Paris, there's one last thing. Could you talk about younger people today and how their coming out might have been made easier by the whole gay movement?

Paris: Sure. I think that the amount of time past since people really started coming out and making a gay life style that is both visible and viable, has been a real plus for people deciding to come out now. In terms of the really young people just discovering their biological sexual urges and needs, it's great not to be pushed into the heterosexual ways of channeling those needs and feelings and to deal with them openly. I'm thinking of people that I know who go to the Monastery, which is a club where liquor isn't served and allows underage kids to get in. On Friday and Saturday night you'll see 30 to 50 kids that are 16, 17, 18 years of age and sometimes even younger. They have a great time. The energy is high and good. They know exactly what they want and who they are, and they're right there doing it without being shuffled out into high school cliques and functions that are heterosexual. They don't have to wait five or six years until they go away to college or get their own place. They can experiment and find out what the life style is like. I think it's great.

Kus: So you think coming out is easier?

Paris: I think it's much easier and healthier now. The living proof is at the Monastery.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we briefly looked at the third and fourth stages of the coming out process, acceptance and action.

We saw that the self-acceptance is gay freedom, and we looked at some characteristics of this. We discussed becoming whole, freedom, the intriguing "seeing society clearer," increased self-confidence, relaxation, energy release, guilt reduction, honesty and candidness, and mental health aspects.

Types of actions discussed included: disclosure, occupational consideration, talking gay, sharing secrets, spotting others, developing social consciousness, developing friendship circles, and religious/spirituality changes.

Having completed our journey through the four stages of coming out, we're now ready to explore one example of Stage IV action, telling the family. But before we do, Lance has a little "epilogue".

Kus: Anything else you can think of?

Lance: Not really. All I can say, to put an epilogue on this story, is that anyone reading or hearing this should realize that being gay is a mind-boggling trip, not very pleasant...Hell, I've been through it all. I even played basketball in high school because I was 6'4". You've got to recognize your feelings and act on them as soon as possible. You don't want to reinforce any negative feeling. Now that I'm not, I'm much happier. If you tell everyone you're gay and they don't like it, they weren't your friends to begin with. It's not a great loss. It's just a curtain that is totally withdrawn. You don't have a pretense anymore. I've found myself thinking I don't want to lose someone's friendship and if I tell that I'm gay they'll have nothing to do with me anymore. But once I tell them, their reactions surprise me, and the friendship grows much closer.

CHAPTER SEVEN - COMING OUT AS A FAMILY AFFAIR

Kus: *Is there anything else you'd like to say before we conclude this interview?*

Fabian: *Hi Mom! Hi Dad!*

INTRODUCTION.

Throughout the annals of recorded history, the family has been the most basic of all social institutions. Because the human infant is helpless longer than any other creature in the animal kingdom,¹ the care which is needed to sustain early human life must fall on the shoulders of the adults of the society. This is nearly universally accomplished within the family.

Through the very important sociological concept known as "socialization," the child learns very basic, though highly complex, tasks necessary for independent life. Language, walking and skipping and jumping, bladder and bowel control, washing and dressing are some of these tasks. On a higher plane, the child learns from the family notions of beauty (a rose) and ugliness (a worm), love and hate, and good and evil; the latter two concepts are the themes of most "kiddie lit" books as well as the themes of Saturday morning TV cartoons.

Also, in this setting, one's self-concept process is begun. And while all symbolic interaction theorists realize that the self-concept

¹For a discussion of the functions of the family, and especially of the special "affectional function" of the American family, see James B. McKee. INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969, pp. 360-364.

is an "always becoming" process throughout human life, they are aware that the early ideas of self gained from the child's impressions of what others are thinking of him or her tend to be more durable than those gained later in life.¹ "Self-concept" here includes both "identity" (Who am I?) and "self-esteem" (What am I worth?). In the family, the child learns its sex, name, race and religion. Further, it learns if it is a "cute" or a "handsome" or a "beautiful" child. Adjectives describing male and female infants begin in the delivery room of the hospital; while parents often describe infants of both sexes as "cute," they usually reserve "handsome" to describe boys and "beautiful" to describe girls. It is also known that individuals, even if they forget a person's name or race or religion or hair color, never forget the person's gender. Thus, one is able to see the profound influence of the family on one's identity and, to a lesser extent I believe, one's self-esteem.

In American society, and in other highly-mobile "advanced" societies, the family, in addition to meeting such basic functions as reproduction, maintenance, socialization and status-role placements, finds itself meeting a crucial and special affectional function of the child. Deprived often of close geographic proximity to extended kinship networks, and deprived of close school chums due to moving out of the neighborhood, the child of a more nuclear-like family needs to get emotional sustenance on a continuing basis from parents and siblings in the absence of nearby grandparents, uncles and aunts, and so on. Because of this affectual

¹ See the discussion of Charles Horton Cooley's Theory of the Social Self in David Dressler. SOCIOLOGY: THE STUDY OF HUMAN INTERACTION. New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1969, pp. 196-200.

function of American families, parent and child often find themselves very close to each other. Also, as our desire for continued education increases, the American child often finds him or herself extending the adolescent period much longer than children in more "primitive" societies. Consequently, living at home and being more dependent on parents for longer periods of time tend to strengthen the emotional bonds between parent and child.

Given this scenario, when the gay child's identity is radically altered from what was all along thought of as straight - and it is safe to say that the overwhelming majority of parents assume their children are straight - to a gay identity, the idea of coming out to parents can be very frightening. One does not want to be rejected by these people who have given so much for so long. On the other hand, one is used to sharing personal goals and dreams and hopes with the parents. Thus, the dilemma which is unique for gay persons presents itself.¹

The following two items indicate the importance attached to the coming out to parents with which gays must somehow deal. Further, even those persons whose parents have died, and thus letting them "off the

¹For a most interesting and informative special report on parents of gays, see THE ADVOCATE's August 13, 1975 issue. Included are: "Parents" by John Preston (p. 21); "Interview with Pat Lund," the mother of a gay son whose family was featured on PBS's An American Family (pp. 23-24); "Parents helping parents: Ma and Pa come out" by Parents of Gays (pp. 24-25); "A feminist perspective: 'Ordinary mother'" by Shelley Singer (pp. 26-35); "Consenting adult" by Laura Z. Hobson (pp. 28-29); an excellent Avoidances cartoon by Dennis Forbes (p. 30); "What did we do wrong?: Evil eyes and genetic pretzels" by Arnie Kantrowitz (p. 31); "Insight: From fantasy to honesty" by Newt Deiter (p. 33); and "To be what we are: Dear Mom and Dad" by Steve (pp. 34-35).

hook" so to speak, frequently tell me that "I don't have to deal with that because my parents are dead, but I've often wondered what would have happened if I had told them."

Q. In working with a large homosexual population, have you found a particular shared problem?

A. No. There are no problems indigenous to the homosexual. With one exception. No one straight has ever had to face their parents and say, "Mom and Dad, I have something to tell you...I'm a heterosexual. That is often a problem indigenous to homosexuals. (Ebert, 1977 & 1978, p. 319)

And from Newt Deiter's "Insight" column in THE ADVOCATE:

There is probably no area of personal interaction in gay life that causes more emotional pain or trouble than the relationships between our parents and ourselves.

From the time many of us first realize the direction of our sexual identity, we fight against the thought that some day our parents will find out. We are often afraid that the knowledge will prove to be such a disappointment to them that we will be faced with an irreparable breach; for that reason alone, we are unable to deal honestly with the situation.

From earliest recollections, we have been presented with a set of conduct expectations; females will find husbands, males will find wives, and we will validate our parents' existence by providing grandchildren. We put ourselves into the trap of believing that we can be happy if we live up to these expectations. More important, we believe we have an obligation to live our lives as they feel we should.

Unless we are extremely lucky, we are also faced with the imposition of generational and value controls that cause a communications gap to exist. Add an overlay of sexual nonconformity, by our parents' standards, and the barriers go up.

(August 13, 1975, p. 33)

In this chapter, then, coming out to family members will be explored. Coming out as an ideal goal, deciding not to come out, living with unspoken assumptions on the part of the gay person and family, some coming out approaches, planning the event, timing (or why tell now), some parental verbal reactions, interactional changes exhibited by family members towards gays as the family members go through their own kind of coming out process, and siblings will all be discussed.

To illustrate the categories and concepts discussed in this chapter, I have chosen one, and often more, interviews from my informants or material from the literature. As will be seen, the slices of data presented could be included in several categories, but I have arbitrarily chosen to include each in a specific category as I felt it best showed the concept under discussion.

I. COMING OUT AS THE IDEAL.

One rainy evening a few weeks ago, as I was sitting at my kitchen table writing, I received a phone call from an acquaintance of mine. This man, in his 60's, proceeded (through an alcohol haze) to tell me he didn't believe in such a thing as "coming out."

There's no such thing actually. All a person needs is to be well-integrated like me. I wouldn't dream of telling everybody under the sun what I do in bed. It's nobody's business. Listen to me, and you'll learn something.

Then, as the lopsided conversation continued, he said,

You know, I really admire people who can come out and be free like that. Of course, I can't do it. Not at my age. I'm too established and settled in in so many ways. But, I really admire those who can come out and be involved in the gay world openly and freely.

And so it is with many gay persons. Coming out to the family is seen as ideal but not always seen as possible. It's risky business. On one hand, there is a desire to share one's life with one's family. The desire to let the folks know about one's lover, for example, and all that entails is important. The desire to be open and honest about something so basic and important as one's sexual orientation is important. On the other hand, acting as a counterbalance, are thoughts of possible rejection or being thrown out or other calamities.

The following slice of data is from Paris, a young man recently divorced. While living a gay lifestyle and having come out to many straight and gay friends, he finds coming out to his parents as too much to handle while thinking it would be ideal if he could come out to them.

Kus: Paris, you mentioned that ideally it would be nice if your family could know that you were gay but that it's not worth the risks right now. What would be ideal about it? What difference does it make for you?

Paris: They could know, and acknowledge, and accept all of me rather than just the person they thought they raised. Like now, I feel everything is fine in terms of loving each other very much. We're very happy, and we get along well. But, there's part of me that they don't even know about. So, that makes it less than ideal 'cause I'm not being totally open and honest. I'm not sure, as I experience it now, if there would be total acceptance of all of me in their view. They give me total support right now, 100%. I don't know why they're giving me total support. Maybe it's because I'm pretty much exactly the kind of person they had in mind when they raised me, except for that little divorce I have on my record. I don't know how the record would look to them if, all of a sudden, in addition to the divorce, it would say gay. This gay isn't even interested in another marriage, folks, out of the question! Also, there is just so much they don't know about my lifestyle over the past years. I'm sure it would just knock my mother to the floor if she knew some of the stuff that had gone on. And it's kind of like part of me would like to share some of that with her because, you know, it's such a major part of my life. My feelings are so strong and it's so emotional. Like when I have a very close friend or if I'm in a relationship, it's so important to me. It's hard not to be able to say, "Well, the reason I talk about this person all the time is because I happen to love him very much, and we're in a very serious one to one relationship." So, instead, it's very casual, every 15 minutes mentioning person X. And it would be nice to give some sort of explanation as to why I'm mentioning person X so much. So, coming out would be ideal in terms of they could know all about me, and it would be the same in terms of our feelings for each other.

II. NO THANKS! - DECIDING NOT TO COME OUT TO THE FAMILY.

After debating in their minds and after lots of deep soul-searching, some gays decide that coming out to the folks simply isn't in the cards. For some, the decision is seen as final. This can bring a peace of mind especially for those psychologically and geographically distant from the family. For others, such as Cowboy, coming out to parents isn't in the program now, but maybe later it will be. For these gays, the same peace of mind may not be as complete in their decision not to tell. And while reasons for not telling are theoretically limitless, I have found six basic reasons, in addition to parental guilt which is nearly universal, which are discussed below.

A. Religious beliefs and guilt.

In examining parental reactions in the gay literature and from the Parents of Gays association, we know that guilt is seen very frequently. "Where did we go wrong?" In American culture, this guilt has two primary sources. First, there is a predominant Judeo-Christian influence which, traditionally, has seen any type of sex outside of heterosexual marriage as wrong. Second, all of American behavioral science theory (sociology, psychology, and social/cultural anthropology) holds that parents influence their children to some degree. Thus, the end product - the adult - is seen as a reflection of the parents and parental skills. The following is an account of why one young man won't tell his folks.

Kus: Do your folks know you're gay?

Cimarron: They know, but there's never been an open statement.

Kus: What do you think would happen if you told them?

Cimarron: I really don't know. I think, my personal opinion is, that my mother would be quite upset and probably be bitter about it. My father would immediately try to assume all the guilt. He's very paranoid about this sort of thing. Also, my family is Reorganized Latter-Day Saints, so you can imagine that whole trip! My father was the oldest in the family, so he fought all the battles for his brothers and sisters under him and advised them as what they could do and couldn't do. So, I think he would take it as some kind of defect in himself, and I really don't think he has the resources to really handle his paranoia. He has great lines like, "Somebody would have to be nuts to go to a psychiatrist." That type of belief. So, I'm better able to balance my lifestyle and lover, Xavier, by not telling him. He just doesn't have the resources to handle it.

Kus: So you feel your parents know you're gay but they would go to pieces if you told them?

Cim.: Yeah. It's kind of their method of doing things. They can compartmentalize different areas of their life. They can know something if they don't have to acknowledge it. They can shuffle it away in the back of their mind and not have to deal with it. I think if it would come forward, there would be a hassle. They might be able to handle it, but if it went to my grandfather, well, he'd rather see me burnt on a cross than to have a grandson who could be gay.

B. Financial loss.

For the young gay especially, telling the folks could lead to a cut off of funds. For the high school person or for the person who finds him or herself in higher education or unemployed, reliance on parents may be a temporary survival technique. Thus, not telling is seen as highly practical for the time being.

Kus: Do you think you'll ever tell your folks?

Paris: On the one hand, I'd very much like my family to know. It would make things very nice. At the same time, considering my family background and their conservative reactionary views, I can also see it turning into a real nightmare. My family is very important to me in terms of my love for them and my feelings for them. They used to say "Why don't you date more often?" or "Why don't you find another girl and settle down?" But lately, they just haven't said such things. Now it's kind of like they're sitting back, not really saying anything,

and just waiting to see what I'm up to. I've talked with my family about not wanting to be involved in another woman, that I'm definitely not into another marriage scene, and I think their whole trip now is, "Let's sit back and see what Paris is up to." And, hopefully, they'll find out. I don't know when, but I guess when I'm at a point that I feel established. I must admit that with my education and everything, I'm completely dependent on them for finances. That could really screw things up, especially with my father, if he reacted in an adverse way. It could alter my educational goals. It could change the outcome occupationally. So, the financial reasons alone preclude my not telling them yet. But, I've given lots of clues. They know I don't want to date women. They know I'm interested in interior design and other artistic things. I don't know if my parents are observant enough to pick up on these things, but I'm not going to rock the boat which has my money in it!
(Paris)

C. Folks' fear of sexuality.

Sex educators, along with such groups as Planned Parenthood, continually complain, justifiably I think, that children do not get adequate sex education in the home. When it is given, it is often too late and/or too little. The "uptightness" of persons in our society is well known and documented. Because of this fear of sexual matters, some gays choose not to tell; it would be embarrassing for the parents to handle, and that is seen as reason enough to clam up.

Kus: Luke, you mentioned earlier that you hadn't told your parents that you're gay. What led you to that decision?

Dr. Luke: Well, basically it's a reluctance on my part to handle it. I developed a hangup early in life never to tell my parents anything about sex because of their own rigidity on the subject and their own fearfulness about sexual matters. What I did do, though, is introduce my parents to my lover. And I had a male lover for over 11 years, and my parents visited me and him in our home lots of times. I've never kept anything a secret except the label, "gay." Of course, I've never said anything about sex either. I suspect they know. They never urged me to get married or any of that trip. So, I've never had to put up with that. But in the realm of sexuality in general, they're very afraid, so I just decided that it would be too much for them to handle.



"Mother, do Jeff and I have to know everything you do in bed?"

D. Personal privacy.

The following account shows a phenomenon which I've found in more than one interview. On the one hand, the individual believes that being gay is a state of being, a lifestyle, a way of looking at oneself and the world, not necessarily indicating any special sexual behavior performance. Acting on that assumption, the person feels it necessary to tell friends of the gay identity to be open and honest. On the other hand, parents are seen in a very different light. A gay identity to them is equated with sex. Therefore, disclosure is not done for personal privacy.

Kus: Lance, you mentioned you consider your foster parents your folks. Have you told them you're gay?

Lance: No, I haven't. I haven't told my adopted parents I'm gay. I have thought of it, of course, I think everybody does. I just don't see why I should personally. They live in Idaho and I live in Washington. It just seems like it's not relevant to the cause. Why bother in other words? I don't ask them how their sex life is! They shouldn't ask me how mine is.

Kus: Are you equating being gay with sex?

Lance: No. I know it's kind of schizy. I tell my friends so that they can know me as a whole person. That's important. But for some reason, with my parents it's different somehow.

E. Not worth the hassle.

For the individual who is not close to the parents, and who has some reason to believe that disclosure of identity could lead to negative reactions, telling is just not worth the hassle. Bob, who is psychologically not too close to his parents nor geographically close, sums it up this way:

I've thought it would be so much easier for me if I were to tell my folks, "Look, I'm gay. I'm happy. I'm living a good life. Now

you can either accept me or reject me." In fact, I've thought of doing that. But, knowing how they feel about anything unusual, or unusual to them, it would be so difficult for me to handle. In the first place, they would be crushed, because they would think that I would be going to hell eternally. Their lives are so different from mine in every respect. I don't see why I should share that aspect with them. My mother told me that if she ever found out that I smoked, she wouldn't speak to me. Now, if she's that uptight about smoking, which I do, I can imagine how bad she'd be about what I do in bed. She's just very conventional in her ways. This way, you know, I'm not opening up myself to them completely; they don't understand. They don't know me very well. And that's fine with me. It's just not worth the hassle. (Bob)

F. Chickening out.

Sometimes a decision to come out is thwarted at the last minute due to a courage failure. In early 1976, a good friend of mine who's a university student and cowboy, drove 500 miles from Montana to Seattle to come out to me. I was the first person he had told. After spending an exciting weekend observing some of Seattle's lively gay discos, restaurants and taverns, this man, whom I'll call Cowboy, decided to tell his rancher parents the next week that he was gay. I asked him to be sure he let me know how it all turned out. The following is an excerpt from a letter I received several weeks later:

Dear Bob,

Maybe you've guessed by now that I can't do it - I can't tell my folks. It's crazy! All the way home (to a small Montana town 1,000 miles from Seattle) I figured out what I was going to say and when. But, when I got here, I realized that I can't do it now - maybe never. Guess the whole idea of coming out is just too much for me right now, and I don't want to rush it.

I don't know if you saw it, but on the Tomorrow program on TV last night were the editors of THE ADVOCATE, BLUEBOY magazine, and the author of AFTER YOU'RE OUT. It was a good program on gays in America and they visited a gay disco in New York. If my folks would have seen that, it probably would have been easier to tell them, but since it's on at midnight, they're usually asleep. Oh, well!

(Cowboy)

III.UNSPOKEN ASSUMPTIONS.

In between not coming out to the family and coming out, there exists the fascinating never-never land of unspoken assumptions. In this somewhat ethereal scenario, the gay person never discloses sexual identity to the family, yet the family acts as though such were the case. At least the gay person assumes the parents probably know, and, after reading the accounts of Trent and Donovan especially, the reader will probably get the same impression. Following are five accounts showing how this phenomenon works.

One important feature to note here is the idea that the father will be more understanding because "he's been around." Time in the armed services, in the work world, and in male-bonding type fraternal lodges, all experiences not had by many mothers, leads some gays to this conclusion. While it is impossible to make generalizations as to whether American fathers or mothers are more likely to be understanding of a child's gay identity disclosure due to my small sample, such would be a topic for further research. If it could be shown, for example, that such out-of-the-house experience does lead to higher tolerance of divergent lifestyles, such information could have political implications in such areas as voting on civil rights issues.

1. Trent.

Kus: Have you told your parents?

Trent: No. But I might tell my father. I don't see any reason to tell my mother. I think they have their suspicions though, but I could be wrong.

Kus: Why do you say that?

Trent: Why do I say that. Well, on one occasion recently, I was home for a visit. My parents and I have gotten much closer in the last 3 or 4 years. My mother was loose at one of the family reunions after she'd had a couple of drinks, and she made a comment in the kitchen about sex or something while talking to my aunts. My mother made some comment about having to use all your hole orifices or something like that. I was sitting in the kitchen at the time, and I looked at her very shocked. And she said, "Don't look at me like that, you know exactly what I'm talking about!" Plus, I had sexual contact with my cousin in the past, so there are rumors around the family. There are other members of the family who are gay, they're accepted, so I suspect that they suspect.

Kus: Why would you tell your father and not your mother?

Trent: I think there would be less a sense of hurt and disappointment on his part. I think he'd understand it. He's been around. I think my mother would internalize some responsibility for it.

Kus: You don't think your dad would?

Trent: I think he would, but I think he's more accepting of the way things are and understands that there's nothing he can do about it at this point. My mother would probably focus on it and feel guilty about it and feel angry at me. I don't think he would feel either of those things, or maybe to a significant or lesser degree. And I think that over a period of time, he would work with it in a more constructive way than she would.

Kus: Do you think you're going to tell them some day?

Trent: (Laughing.) I honestly don't know. I'm sure that one day it's going to come to a head. And it's going to come up, and I'm going to wind up saying something. I don't know if I'd do it voluntarily if the situation didn't arise that I had to say something. My little sister is finally having a baby, so on one hand, that kind of lets me off the hook. But on the other hand, I think it may up the ante depending on how they see it. There's a note that I should add about that. My father's been in the Army a lot of his life, and being in a male environment, I'm sure that he's wise. I never knew him to have a lot of close friends, but I suspect there were close relationships that he had with people because he still gets written to by people who were under him a lot. A lot of expressions of feelings are transmitted in those letters. Like father-son kinds of things. But I think he has an understanding of male affection. Maybe that's why I feel I could talk to him about it. He always asks about my best friend. Recently on the phone I was telling him how Jim was down in

New Mexico and that he was coming to Seattle to visit me. He said, "Why don't you move down to New Mexico (laughs) and be sure to tell James to come visit" and all that kind of stuff. And over the years that Jim and I have known each other, both sides of our family have really sort of treated us as a couple. My dad was telling me that Jim and me should buy some land together and stuff like that. So I think he has a pretty strong suspicion. Plus, he said on this one phone call, that it didn't matter a lot to him - we were talking about my coming home - he didn't care. He said it wasn't important to him for me to live up to somebody else's expectations, that I should live my life for me, not other people, and that I should live with whomever I want to live with. He said he'd always accept me as his son, and all this kind of stuff. So, I get the feeling...

Kus: It sounds as though he's giving you the ideal response of a parent to coming out before you've done it.

Trent: Yeah.

Kus: That's pretty neat.

Trent: It is on one hand. But I wonder about it. Parents, when you are away, want you home. So, in my fantasy there's a lot of substance, but I'm not sure if it's the same as the reality of being home. I've had friends who could really accept my coming out very easily. Then, when they actually see me with a boyfriend, all of a sudden they were put in touch with the reality of their own fears and social responses. That's why I don't know if I'll tell him. My fantasy of where he's at in his mind might not be the same as the reality.

2. Sr. Theresa.

After having been in a traditional order of nuns who wore the complete habit, Sr. Theresa transferred to an order where no habit was worn. Her story indicates an assumption of lesbian identity due to her profession.

Kus: Did you tell your folks that you were lesbian?

Sr. T: No. My father died the year before, and my mother died when I was very young. So, I didn't have that issue of coming out. Except that when I saw him back in the year before he died, he was wondering if this was an issue. A very curious kind of thing. I was no longer in the habit at that time, so I dressed up to really please him. He asked, but I just

laughed good-naturedly at him and talked about dressing up like this just for him. So, it didn't go into anything more than that. Because at that time I was, you know, in the questioning process but hadn't actually accepted a lesbian label for myself.

Kus: You mean he actually asked you if you were a lesbian?

Sr. T: Yeah. But that was not because of anything I was doing. It was more because of the religious community I belonged to. He was a non-Catholic, and his idea about convent life was that it was a bunch of lesbians living together for the glory of God (chuckles) and whatever else! Yeah, he had very curious ideas about my vocation. It was hard enough for him to even accept the idea that I was a Catholic, and then I became a Sister. The only reason he could handle it at all was that he figured I was getting an education and was doing all right professionally, so it must be all right. He never really understood it.

3. Rita.

Kus: So, your 2 sisters don't know?

Rita: My one sister should know. I haven't told her. I think that she knows though. I'm closest to my brother, so that's probably why I wanted to tell him about it. The sister I'm closest to should know though.

Kus: Why would you think she knows?

Rita: Well, I've always lived with other women. One for six years, and now I'm living with someone for the last two years. Also when I send cards and letters, I'll say so and so says "hi," 'how are you,' and things like that and try to include that this other person is part of my life and wants to be involved with the other in-laws so to speak. So, I think she knows by that.

4. Skip.

Kus: What do you think your dad would say?

Skip: I don't know. I don't think it would surprise him too much.

Kus: Why is that?

Skip: Because when he was visiting me in San Diego, we were walking down the street. And somebody I'd met at a gay bar said hello to me, and he was overtly gay, not effeminate, but gay appearing. And my dad said, "Did you meet him on the ship?"

and I said, "Well..." and he started to say something but he didn't really finish what he was going to say. He kind of cut it off. I think he could tell the guy was gay. I have a funny feeling that my dad has his own feelings towards gay people. I mean leaning towards gayness I should say. I don't really think he is, but I don't know, it's hard to say. I know he was in the South Pacific and, I assume, mostly with men. I don't know if he had any sex with men or whatever, but I kind of feel he knows what's going on. I don't know what he would say. I don't know if he could even stand it. So, because I don't know how he would take it, I'm afraid to find out! (Skip)

5. Donovan's story.

Of the five accounts given in this section, the story of Donovan and his family's reaction to his gayness best illustrates the idea of living in a world of unspoken assumptions, and very successfully. Although he hasn't told his parents that he's gay, there is little doubt they don't know. Further, this account shows a type of in-law behavior on the part of the parents which most gays would truly envy. More will be said about the role of another gay sibling in helping smooth the path for coming out in a later section of this chapter.

Kus: Did you tell your folks that you were gay?

Donovan: It was never expressed in words, but they know. And they know that Marty is my lover. They really like Marty. As a matter of fact, there was one point in my life when I got an anal fissure, which was from having anal intercourse, and my parents were very understanding. They tried to offer help. Actually, my father has done a lot for gay rights at his work (as a federal judge.) My older brother is gay, and he has told them both verbally, and they're very understanding of him. So, even though I've never said it, they know.

Kus: Why didn't you tell them?

Donovan: Well, I'm not that close to my folks. My older brother is very close to them. And there never seemed to be any reason to tell them, because it was my own life. Same back in the '60's when I was heavily into drugs. It was understood that I was taking drugs, but I never came out and said that I'm

taking LSD every night or anything like that. It's just that I'm not that close to my folks. They're very happy that I met Marty. They've met some of my lovers in the past (laughs) who were a little on the scuzzy side, so...

Kus: Do your folks know that Marty is your lover?

Donovan: Yes. They're very proud of him.

Kus: How are they proud of him?

Donovan: They think that he's really very nice and gentle, an amiable person, and he doesn't put on airs. He is also very motivated, and he's just what they like to see in a person. (Laughing)...more than a female impersonator or a junkie. So that's why they like him.

Kus: Okay now. How do your parents know that Marty is your lover and that you're gay?

Donovan: Okay. Well, first of all, when I had my anal fissure, my father told me that the next time I have any intercourse, I should use a lubricant. Which would suggest that he probably thinks that I'm gay. Second, when my sister got married in Washington, D.C., my parents put Marty up in a hotel and paid for his room. And in the front of the church where they have the family trip where the groom's family sits on one side and the bride's sits on the other, my parents insisted that Marty sit up with us because he was part of the family. So he was there along with my older brother's girlfriends and my grandfather's mistress (laughs), and it was, I think, a rather direct way of showing it. Also, they always include Marty's birthday when they send out cards and things like that. And Marty always stays at the house when we visit, so...

Kus: What clues did you give to get them to do all those things?

Donovan: Well, I don't think I got them to do those things really. I didn't even suggest any of those things. I'd've been happy if Marty had sat in the back of the church, and I think he would have been happy too. As far as clues, just the fact they knew that I was in love with somebody, and I was always talking about this person named Marty when I'd call on the phone and that he was very important in my life.

Kus: You told them on the phone that you were in love with Marty?

Donovan: Not in love. But I would always talk about Marty and mention things that we were doing and how wonderful he was. And I wasn't talking about anyone else to them. I think both of my parents are pretty good with figuring out what's going on.

Kus: Do you think you could tell them you're gay?

Donovan: Oh, I'm sure I could, but I don't see any point to it. I just am not that close to them.

IV. COMING OUT APPROACHES.

It has been said that death is the great equalizer; whether a pauper or a prince, we all must face the end of our earthly existence. So is coming out to the family a great equalizer; gay activists often have as much fear and trepidation as a high school gay.

From both the literature and from my informants' interviews, one can usually say that parents are the most difficult of all Biographical Others to tell of one's gay identity. Persons unfamiliar with this phenomenon are often amazed to find gays who are open to everyone in their lives yet cringe at the thought of telling the family. One national gay leader with whom I'm familiar, for example, has given public lectures at universities all over the country on homosexuality, has told both his gay and straight friends he's gay, is involved deeply in the gay liberation movement both in America and on the international scene, is open in his Midwestern church where he's a minister, and yet he's never come out to his parents. It is often said that once a person has told his or her parents, "the other tellings are a piece of cake."

In a very delightful and most humorous article, "How to come out without being thrown out," Jeanne Cordova (1975, pp. 89-95) discusses five coming out approaches she's uncovered. In her introduction to her article, she says,

But the matter only begins with this assertion. [The assertion is that..."I give no world, no society, no oppressor the right to board me up."] The question is not whether or not to come out, but When, Where, and How to come out - with the least possible cost to ourselves. It's a skill...and we need to know how to take care of ourselves. Experience has shown me there are good (successful) and bad (on the self-esteem) ways to handle this oppressive but inevitable process. Usually admitting homosexuality to one's family is the most difficult and last place to come out. (p. 89)

Three of the five approaches Cordova discusses were found in the accounts of the informants. They are the Oops approach, the Dear Mom/Dad approach, and the Naturalization approach. Not found in my interviews were the So There! approach and the Help Me, Help Me syndrome.

Theoretically, one would expect that how one comes out to parents would lead to how the parent will react both immediately upon receiving the news and also how they'll make the adjustment through time. However, I've found that the coming out process which family members undergo through time in reality seems unrelated to the coming out approach used.

A. The Help Me, Help Me syndrome.

The Help Me, Help Me syndrome is more a prostration, prostitution, or grovel than a statement and is always received as such. (It goes something like this:)

"Mom?"

"What is it, dear?"

"Oh Mom, I have to...I can't..."(tears)

"You can tell me anything darling, you know how much your father and I love you and how much..."

"That's why I want to tell you, I need...your...I'm afraid I'm..."

etc. (This approach often leads to a Cure Specialist.)

(Cordova, 1975, p. 90)

None of my informants reported using this approach. Perhaps this is due to a relatively sophisticated urban sample. And perhaps this is due to the effects of gay liberation on the informants. The days of seeing homosexuality as a form of mental illness are rapidly disappearing except in a few homophobic circles. The Help Me, Help Me syndrome, an expression of an implicit buying into such pre-scientific myth systems as psychoanalytic theory and its anti-gay notions, is thus out of date. I would venture to guess that in the '50's and '60's such an approach would have been uncovered a great deal in studies similar to mine.

B. The So There approach.

The So There Approach, one of the most dangerous, is similarly not very successful, but has a unique loophole. Marked by extreme anger/hatred/bitterness towards parents, which is always justified but sometimes careless, the announcement is bluntly made in the middle of a family argument which usually has nothing to do with sexual orientation.

Dad: "And I'll tell you something else, you ungrateful son (daughter) of a bitch, you never were any good, you'll never amount to anything, you're nothing..."

Child: "I'll tell you what I am, I'll tell you something you can really have a migraine over...I'm a homosexual. Yeah, that's right - a Queer! Fruit! Dyke! Faggot! (so there!)" (Cordova, 1975, 90-91)

Cordova points out that this type of interaction is used most frequently by the live at home, high school gay. One can imagine the scene: a high schooler at the age of wanting independence, coupled with the surging of emotions and energy of youth, added to poor anger management coping skills due to age, leading to such a blowup. Once again, such an approach is rather unsophisticated. With my sample being composed of persons having greater amounts of formal education than the general population, it is easy to see why I haven't run across this approach.

C. The Oops approach.

The Oops Approach goes like this:

I answered the phone last week.

"This is your mother..."

"Yes, Mother..."

"I'm calling...you left...while you were here...one of your books..."

"Oh no, really? I guess I'll have to come out and pick it up."

"Well, that's not what I'm calling about..."

"Oh, well?"

"Jeanne...there was a letter in the book."

"A letter?"

(The letter!!! Oops!) "oh...a letter."

"What does this letter mean, Jeanne?"

Well, as "luck" would have it, it was one of those letters...the one about the night before...nitty gritty you know. Not much room

for beating around the bush. "I guess I...a...it means what it says...I guess."

"Jeanne, I think you'd better come out here tonight so we can have a talk."
(Cordova, 1975, pp. 91-92)

Unlike the other four coming out approaches, the Oops approach is genuine "Panic City Time." It is the only one over which the gay person has lost control over the timing, planning, setting of the disclosure. Following discovery, then, the gay must then go into action quickly to "pick up the pieces" so to speak.

In the account of Rev. Eric, we see a rather complicated series of events. Caught through a letter, Eric tells his parents only to discover they've known for some time. Further, and rather humorously in retrospect, Eric submits to a quacky "cure specialist" to help keep the peace and defuse a potentially volatile family situation. Through time, his parents learned, somewhat, to accept his gay identity.

Kus: How about your family life? Did you tell your parents you were gay?

Eric: They discovered it. So, we had it out. They weren't going to say anything, but when I knew that they knew, I just couldn't stand having it just under the table. So, I brought it up.

Kus: Could you give me the whole scenario of what happened?

Eric: Well, two times in my life I was deeply in love, and this was the first time. My lover and I were breaking up. This was in California, and my parents had moved to California and had been down there for about 2 years. They had known Rex and liked him very much, and they saw how deeply affected I was with the breakup. Well, they were concerned and went to a psychiatrist about me. He left them no doubt that I was gay, I found out later, and told them if I would come in to see him he would give me 'shots.' But in any case, they knew about 6 months before I even knew that they knew. In the meantime, I was writing to a soldier who was in Korea, and I started a letter to him. I was living with my parents at that time. Anyway, that night when I got home, I went to finish the letter, and it was missing. And I didn't know what in the world I had done with it. Finally, something

went off in my head, and I looked out in the garbage. There it was all torn up. Well, I knew that they knew. It turned out that it was my mother that found it and read it. And I had said some very revealing things in it. So, anyway, I went for about 24 hours and thought, well, I might as well get it out now. The following night, I called my dad into the bedroom and said, "Dad, I found the letter." He didn't know what I was talking about. So I said, "It must have been mother, but we might as well have this all out." I went in and told my mother that I had found the letter, and dad wanted to know what it was all about. I was just open about it. Their reactions were very surprising. Dad said, "Well, we've known for about 6 months" and told me what the psychiatrist had said. So anyway, he wanted me to have the shots and I said, "All right, if you want me to pay for them, but it won't make any difference."

Kus: What kind of shots were they?

Eric: Lord only knows! Hormones I suppose. (Lots of laughter from Kus and Eric.) I know that one doctor talked to me and told me about a hormone salve to test on my chest. And that would change me. It didn't. So, anyway, it's a situation we don't talk about much. They were a little upset with the television and news media publicity about me in the past year...

Kus: Was that in relation to your counseling job with hustlers?

Eric: Yes, that and a confrontation show which featured 2 homophobes. Anyway, I didn't particularly worry about it. I thought to myself, well, it's on channel 9, and my folks and relatives - about 20 in town - never watch channel 9. Well, it so happened one of the people from channel 9 came out to the house and took some clips, and there I was. Then, the day it was to be filmed, both the P-I and TIMES had big articles about the program and my name was mentioned. My dad told me later that lots of the neighbors wanted to know if that was his son. I said, "Dad, I hope you told them I was." And he said yes. But anyway, it embarrassed them. And I'm sorry for that. I've got to be me, and I am in the fight for human rights, my own, for gays, and for all human rights. And somewhere along the way a stand has to be made. But, all in all, they've been pretty good about it. My father is very surprising; he's the more understanding of the two which is probably unusual for a gay man.

Kus: Interestingly, I'm finding the fathers in these interviews are usually the most understanding.

Eric: Isn't that something?!

The next account is intriguing as it shows how the Oops approach led to being thrown out (by the father) which led to a Dear Mom/Dad approach.

As will be shown later in this chapter, Tony's parents, with the help of a most understanding grandmother, learned to accept both Tony and his lover Jon.

Tony: I didn't want my parents to find out then that I was gay, but it happened. I was in a barroom back in my hometown in Maryland. There's only 5 bars there. So, it was crowded one night, and I had just walked in. Some guy was talking to a real good friend of mine and telling him I was playing around with a married man's wife. I walked in and said, "Are you still talking?" And his back was to the door, and he didn't see me. So I walked up to him and tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Well, if you think I'm such a heterosexual, just drop your drawers and bend over." And I said it loud enough so that everyone in the bar heard me. And my parents were down at the other end of the bar. Which is the way they found out I was gay. The next day, well it was actually that night around 2:30 in the morning when the bar closed, my dad came home and told me to get out or he'd kill me. He gave me until the morning to get out.

Kus: What did your mother say?

Tony: My mom didn't say much of anything. My dad is the head of the house. Now she'll speak up more, but then she wouldn't.

Kus: Did you leave home? Did you ever get back in touch?

Tony: Yeah. I left and was living in Seattle. Just one day I faced up to myself and said I'm this way. People got to accept me the way I am. So, I wrote a letter to my folks. The letter was really an explanation about my lifestyle, the way I am and the way I'll always be. Because I don't feel that I chose this way, it's just the way I was made to be.

Kus: What exactly did you write to them in the letter?

Tony: Oh, I told them I was a homosexual and that I was going with this one guy and that I really cared for him a lot like you and dad care about one another and have a relationship. It was a 13-page letter. I was trying to prove to them that it was right for them and right for me to have our relationships. I was trying to make myself realize that it was okay to be gay. But it was going against all the learning I'd ever had. The religious aspect. But I wrote and told them anyway. I got a phone call from them when they had received the letter, and they said, "No, this is wrong" and everything. And I hadn't heard from them in about 3 years, but I had accepted it within that time, within myself, that it was okay to be gay and a Christian at the same time.

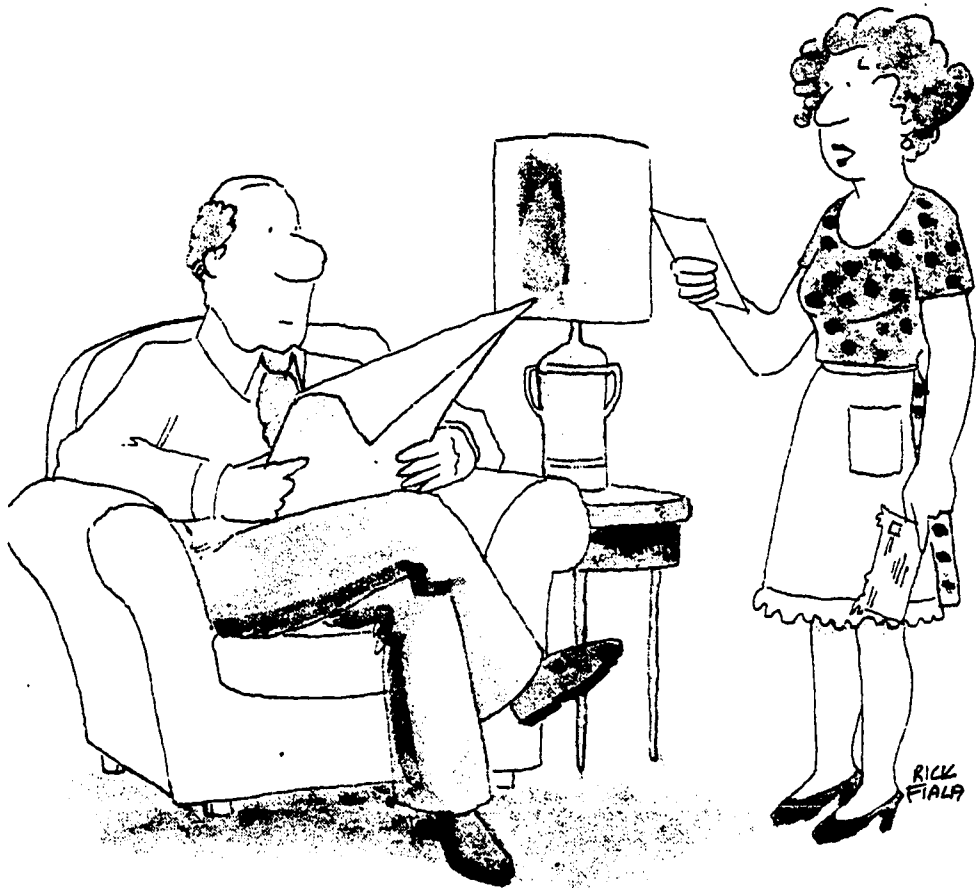
D. The Dear Mom/Dear Dad approach.

And then of course, there is the Dear Mom/Dear Dad Approach, a favorite of the, "They're in New York and I'm in California...so it's safe," live-away gay. (Cordova, 1975, p. 92)

Letters to disclose sexual orientation are common when there's a large geographic distance between the parents and the child. Often, the gay person wants very much to come out to the family, but the cost of flying across country for this purpose is prohibitive. This is especially true of the young gay person in college or just starting out on a career and not having much money. Why one chooses the letter approach has many reasons.

A few years back, two of my friends (who I'll call Phil and Sam) who were lovers and lived together and had several gay posters decorating their college apartment walls, received a letter from Sam's folks saying they were coming to town for a visit. Although Phil had already come out to his folks, Sam had not. What to do?! Should we try to "butch it up," take down the posters, and fake it, or should we let them in on the scoop? That was the question faced by Phil and Sam. Sam opted for the Dear Mom/Dear Dad approach so that when his parents arrived for the visit, they wouldn't be surprised at his and Phil's lifestyle together.

In the following account, an impending visit wasn't the reason for the letter approach. Rather, it was a combination of factors: Mark lived in Seattle while dad was in New Jersey; Mark wanted to be open and free like his lover; and finally, he wanted to improve communication. It is noteworthy that coming out letters are rather long, well thought out, and they usually attempt to answer perceived objections which parents would



"Henry, you know that phase little Hank was going through?
Well, it just turned into a lifestyle."

would likely make.

Kus: How did you tell your father?

Mark: I wrote a letter to him in 1975. At that time, he was in New Jersey and I was here in Seattle. I wanted to get straight with him. I'd come to terms with myself and my employer. I told my employer. The primary catalyst there was that I was about to be identified in the press, and I felt this was important to tell my employer. I did, and it was a real release off my shoulders. And at that time, I was involved in a relationship with Flip who was somebody sixteen years my junior. And Flip, throughout this period when I first got to Seattle, played a very important part in my life. He showed me where young people were at in their heads. They didn't come at this consciousness of sexuality with all the kinds of guilt I had experienced, the kinds of attitudes. Flip had always been upfront with himself, something I notice increasing numbers of young people are able to be very honest about... one of the benefits of the sexual revolution I guess. So, I saw what it could be, and I saw his honesty with his family and friends, and it was a wonderful example for me. I just finally had to cope and deal with dad. So I wrote this letter. It was a disaster in terms of how he reacted.

Kus: What did you put in the letter?

Mark: It was very long. But basically, I said that I was tired of living a lie, that I loved him, and that I really wanted to be myself. And I said I had felt this inability to be honest with him in this area, and that had served as a barrier to our communication. This letter was going to a man in his mid-60's. Somebody who's pretty rigid and not liberal in any social areas. He reacted very badly to it. He guilt-tripped himself and all, a totally expected reaction. And we still, to this day, haven't resolved it.

Kus: He wrote you a letter?

Mark: Yeah. It was a very nasty letter. He told me that I was always welcome to come home but to never, never bring any of my friends with me. That just made me angrier than hell since in the course of my life at home I'd had 2 ongoing relationships. And both of them had met him, and he'd liked both of them very much, and there was never any problem. But, the nature of the relationships were never discussed openly. They were just guests in the house. So, now that he would know what the relationship was, they couldn't come. And that just made me angry.

Kus: Do you still communicate?

Mark: No. We still have not been able to. Communications are worse now than they ever were.

Kus: Did you tell him that those 2 guys he liked a lot were gay?

Mark: No. There wasn't reason to say anything about that though I could have said something about that. But until he made the issue of don't bring any of your friends home, it didn't really come to my mind.

Kus: One last question. Do you think it might have been better for you to come out to your father in person rather than by letter?

Mark: More traumatic! Been more difficult. And whether in one swoop like that we could reach over years of bad communication is the question I have. What I discovered going away to school, being away at school, and being in the Army, was that my dad and I could communicate through letters better than we could in 1:1. In 1:1, he would tighten up, I would tighten up. But in letters, we could tell each other things we were unable to do face to face.

E. The Naturalization approach.

The naturalization approach is one in which the subject of gay identity is made known gradually over time and which is the most effective of all approaches (Cordova, 1975, p. 92).

This approach is the most mature of the approaches and the most complex. This is the one which one would expect an effective counselor to advise. By nature, it is the longest-running approach in coming out. Not only does this method of coming out imply advanced planning, but it also implies a willingness on the part of the gay person to help, in different kinds of ways, the parents to accept the gay identity. Being willing to share gay literature, encouraging parents to talk with a gay counselor - or at least an understanding straight one, introducing gay friends, and keeping lines of communication open are some of these helping mechanisms. The gay person, in this model, becomes a teacher or guide for her/his parents' journey towards acceptance.

In many of the interviews, we see the naturalization approach in

existence after the telling. For example, although Rev. Eric and Tony both found themselves in the "oops" situation, both found themselves in time doing teaching to get parental understanding. Consequently, I would amend Cordova's definition of this approach to include the process of helping one's parents accept after the telling instead of merely before the telling. With this amendment, one can see this process as life-long in some instances.

Finally, this approach assumes a healthy self-esteem on the part of the gay person. If one is seeing self as "worthless," "sick," or "spiritually dead," it would be difficult to carry out an effective program designed for getting others to accept this identity in a positive light. One can theorize that as gay liberation meets its goal of increasing self-esteem among gay persons, this will be the dominant approach used by gays in coming out.

One man's account of how he helped his mother through literature is given below. [For a fuller discussion on how Mitch actually came out in the first place to his mom, see Section F, Part 2 of this chapter.]

I gave her Troy Perry's THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD AND HE KNOWS I'M GAY, George Weinberg's SOCIETY AND THE HEALTHY HOMOSEXUAL, and an article entitled "A Christian response to homosexuality." (Kus: Did she enjoy them?) Well, she said of Troy Perry's book, "I'm reading it, but not enjoying it." I think that part of it was that Troy talks about his sexual experiences, and when it comes right down to it, more than anything else, just the sex bothers her. But she said, "I read it, and when I finished it, I realized he's right. What they do to gay people is really terrible." And I kind of wanted to say, "What about me? What they do to me?" And it was kind of an attitude of they're all right as long as they don't move into my neighborhood. But that book made her aware of the nature of homosexual oppression, and then SOCIETY AND THE HEALTHY HOMOSEXUAL made her realize the nature of victimless crime. And she said to me, in relation to an incident in a drug store she used to own when a transvestite came in and she called the police on him, had him busted. She said, "You know, I read that book, and I realized that a man who

wears women's clothes is not hurting anybody, and it was just the fear and hatred. That's exactly what it was. It was fear and hatred that made me turn this one man that came in. (Mitch)

V. PLANNING THE EVENT.

For the gay individual who has decided to tell the family, planning the event and the setting for disclosure are important. Who will be there and where will it take place? In this section, I look at six areas which deal with the orchestration of the event: distinguishing the various cast members in the scene; planning in fantasy; giving clues and the blindness which often results; setting the stage; testing the waters; and, finally, trying to manipulate conversations so the folks will ask the gay if s-he is gay.¹

A. Distinguishing the cast's characters.

To plan a social event effectively, especially one which is likely to evoke some strong emotions, one must figure out who is most likely to "go to pieces" and who'll probably take the news calmly. One's guesses don't always pan out, but at least the consideration of possibilities

¹In a very insightful article titled, "Telling the family you're gay" (1979, pp. 88-100), Dr. Betty Berzon discusses such things as why disclose, guidelines for disclosure, special issues in the disclosing process such as parental guilt and should one's lover accompany one to the telling of the parents, after the initial disclosure, and if parents don't accept the gayness. This article even has a sample outline for a "letter of affirmation" which can be used in the Dear Mom/Dear Dad approach to coming out. This is an excellent article for gays planning on telling their parents, and it is a good article for academics who are interested in a short, concise article on the realities of disclosure which gays must consider.

gives the producer of the act some sense of direction to follow.

Kus: Do you think you'll tell your other sisters?

Vincent: I feel my oldest sister is waiting for some kind of pronouncement. I think she knows. I think my middle sister knows, but it's going to be a little more difficult telling her. For one thing, both of them are married. My oldest sister is married to a brother-in-law that I dearly love. I know he'll accept it too. I don't think he fully understands homosexuality, and he'll have a lot of questions I know he'll ask me. But he'll accept me. But my middle sister, it's going to be a little tougher to deal with, because she is also very religiously oriented, and she's married to a very homophobic husband. Very macho, coach type of man. In fact, that's what he is, a coach. And I think it's going to be difficult telling her knowing how my brother-in-law will probably accept it. But I'm going to do it regardless. That was another thing my parents tried to discourage. They tried to present all the negative aspects of telling these people. "You'll lose your friends, you won't see your nieces anymore because her husband is not going to accept it," and they also assume that my oldest sister's husband will not be able to accept it either. But I feel totally confident that he will be able to accept it. And I think he knows already anyway.

B. Planning in fantasy.

"How I'll probably go about telling" is seen in the account below.

Although Rita had told her mother of a relationship she was having with a former woman lover a few years in the past, her mother felt it was just a phase she was going through. Therefore, Rita now feels she must go through the coming out process to let mom know "it's for keeps." Here's the plan:

Kus: Has it been your experience that most people accept you?

Rita: Yeah. Most people accept it. Except my mother. Maybe that is why I should come right out and say, "Hey, you remember when I told you about that one experience? Well, you know, I don't want to say I never outgrew it, but, I'm still the same. I'm still me, and I'm attracted to females. I have a real nice relationship and I'm very happy." I think it would hurt her a little bit, because she might think she'd done something wrong when I was little. But on the other hand, if she knew I was happy, we wouldn't play these little

evasive games. Like she used to ask me who I was dating, aren't you going to get married. And she doesn't ask me those things anymore. I think maybe I should reaffirm what's really happening, because there's tension. I'm sure there's tension in her mind, just like there's tension in mine.

Kus: How will you do it, by letter or what?

Rita: No, if I was going to do it, I'm afraid it would have to be in person. I just couldn't do it by letter or a phone call to Ohio. It's too impersonal. It would have to be in person.

Kus: How would you go about it?

Rita: (Laughs) Well, when we were alone, just my mom and me, I'd probably say, "You know, there's something that's really been bothering me. I've wanted to tell you this, and I thought you knew. But I didn't come out and tell you, but I still feel that there's this tension between us, and I'd like to clear the air." And then I'd probably say, "I'm sure that you know, or that you've had these thoughts, that Lori and I were having a relationship, you know, that was more than just a friendship. I wanted you to know that." But then I'd add on also that I'm very happy, and I wanted to clear the air, and "how do you feel about that?"

C. Giving clues and blindness.

For some gays, giving others clues as to their gay identity is done as part of the naturalization process before the actual telling. It's a way of "softening them up" for the news. As more gays come out of the closet, and as more straight persons become familiar with "gay talk" and humor and lifestyle signs, the greater will be the possibility of picking up on these clues. For now, however, there is often a tremendous blindness which often exists on the part of both non-gays and gays to even massive onslaughts of clues. It would appear that the blindness to gay clues is seen more frequently in older persons and to those who are very close emotionally to the gay person. Both of these are just guesses, but I suspect they are very gross generalizations which could probably be uncovered by further research.

In Paris' story, we see him try to give clues to his junior college age brother. In the second piece, Karla Jay talks about the notion of blindness on the part of friends and her mother despite overwhelming evidence of a lesbian identity.

Kus: How about your brother?

Paris: I had almost assumed that he knew everything. A few months ago, I had a party, and approximately 95% of the people who came to this party were gay. My brother, all he could say was, "Where are the chicks?". I don't know whether it's a suburban sort of naivete, but he doesn't pick up on a lot of clues that are right there in front of him if would just open his eyes. Because my brother and I do a lot in terms of seeing each other occasionally. He comes over, and he's met a lot of my friends that are gay. And he's been point blank, (laughs) quite outwardly cruised, and I guess he doesn't pick up on it. He's so content in his suburban straight, macho, jock role that he doesn't pick up on these other things.

Kus: Does he know that these people he's meeting are gay? Did he know that most of the people at the party were gay?

Paris: No. He knows some of my friends are gay, but I didn't say I was having a gay party. I just said I'm having a brunch, and if you'd like to stop by, it should be a good time. I don't know. He's just 20, so I'm thinking maybe he just hasn't been out enough in terms of experiencing what the real world is all about yet. Very sheltered by my parents in terms of whatever he wants, he gets. Any problems, they take care of them. They live several miles outside the city. I know that when I came here to go to the U, I sure had my eyes opened up a lot. There were great people very comfortable and happy with lifestyles involving members of the same sex, rather than everywhere you look you see a cute little boy and girl couple. So, maybe he's still into that.

And the following from Karla Jay:

When I finally came out publicly again, shortly after my graduation from Barnard, I found it easier to tell new people but most difficult to tell those who had presumed I was straight. Maybe it was guilt because my earlier pretense had probably caused their incorrect inference. But there were terrible cases of blindness on the part of heterosexuals. I had one straight roommate twice in New York and in Los Angeles, and she seemed not to notice an incredible number of women who paraded into my bedroom at night and who emerged only the next morning. She also assumed that my marching in gay liberation parades and going to gay liberation meetings were acts of sympathy, and once she came in while I was engaged in bit of foreplay

(to phrase it genteelly) with a lover. Later she told me (after someone had finally told her I'm a lesbian - a fact that after all this took her by surprise) that she thought I had been "comforting her."

This experience is not some peculiar exception, and lesbians could take note that heterosexuals have an amazing capacity for blindness, or perhaps they refuse to notice it in the way any polite person might refuse to see another's dandruff. If I had to give an award to the blindest heterosexual I've known, it would be a tough decision...The prize might also go jointly to my parents, who were surprised to discover in 1976 that I'm a lesbian (It) - their discovery occurred when they saw me on Tom Snyder's Tomorrow Show. How they didn't know was what surprised me. After all, I had lived with the same lover until 1975 for over five years, we had bought a car jointly, we had moved twice together, and then there was the fact that I had coedited two gay liberation anthologies.¹ But they never had to confront it, and I never told them in explicit enough terms (although when I told them that I loved the woman I was living with - what could be more explicit than that - they thought it was fine to have "such good friends"), and they were doing a wonderful job of ignoring the obvious that I let it pass. And now that they can no longer deny my lesbianism, they still don't accept it, as my lesbianism is still referred to in family circles.

(Jay, 1978, p. 29)

D. Setting the stage.

In all of the gay literature and in the interviews, it appears that telling one's gay identity occurs almost anywhere, in the workplace, in a bar, at a social gathering. However, the planned telling to one's family almost always occurs in only one of two places, the home or in a restaurant, never in a public place such as on a bus, in a department store, or at the circus. This, I think, is highly significant. In both of these settings, the gay person has some control over the situation. Home is a familiar place. Should there be ranting and raving, at least

¹The two anthologies referred to here, coedited with Alan Young, are OUT OF THE CLOSETS: VOICES OF GAY LIBERATION (1972) and AFTER YOU'RE OUT: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF GAY MEN AND LESBIANS (1975).

it's sheltered in a private place. In the restaurant setting, which generally calls for one to be in a relaxed, mellow, or cheery frame of mind, one knows that the norm of acceptable restaurant behavior will prevail; the parent isn't likely to "lose it" in such a setting making a public spectacle of him/herself. Further, it is in a restaurant setting that getting mom and pop to have some wine or cocktails is easiest to accomplish, at least in some families. Thus, alcohol can be effectively used here to act as a buffer of emotions.

In the following accounts, the restaurant is the setting. Monty tells his sister and winds up with a surprise. The second scene is a psychologist's story taken from Don Clark's *LOVING SOMEONE GAY* and shows the humor which, in retrospect, exists in telling the folks.

Kus: How did you go about telling your sister? Did you do anything special?

Monty: Well, I decided that I would tell my sister first before telling my folks to see how she'd handle it. I made elaborate plans to have a wonderful dinner at one of the best restaurants in Great Falls, you know, steak, fine wine, candlelight, the works. Anyway, towards the end of the meal, my sister, who's a couple of years older than me, said she thought I had something on my mind. So, I told her that I wanted her to know that I'm gay. She laughed, took my hands, and she told me that she had been wanting to come out to me for a long time, too. She's a lesbian! From that meeting, we've never been closer.

And the story from Don Clark:

(The psychologist son plans a special Miami vacation for him and his mom who's 80 years old. This is setting the stage. Near the end of a wonderful meal at an 'in' restaurant, he reached across the table and said,)

"Mother, I want to tell you something about me that I have never told you. First I want you to know I love and respect you. Second I want you to know that I have held off telling you for years because I was afraid it might hurt you. Now I know that it is good news and that I am cheating both of us by not sharing it."

"So what is it already?" she asked. "You've got a secret wife, or

maybe two of them?"

"No, Mom, it's that I'm Gay. It means that I'm more attracted to men than to women."

His mother's brow wrinkled as she thought it over. "That's how come you been living with Tommy all these years? That's how come you bought the building together?"

"Yes, Mom, Tommy is my lover and it is like we are married." My psychologist friend was now in a sweat.

More wrinkled brow. "So how come all these years I never met his parents?"

"Because, like I said, I was afraid to tell you, and Tommy was afraid to tell his parents."

Her brow arched. "Funny world, different than when I was young. Tommy's nice. You could have done worse."

There was a long silence now. His mother seemed lost in thought. She looked around the restaurant at the other diners. "Is there anything else you want to ask me, Mom?"

"About that? No. Tommy's nice, but I think I should meet his parents."

"But you were so quiet, Mom. You must have been thinking about something."

"I was thinking how nice Miami is. Just like I expected. And I was wondering what kind of restaurant we're going to eat in tomorrow night."
(Clark, 1977, pp. 112-113)

E. Testing the waters.

Testing the waters, like giving clues, can be seen as part of the naturalization approach. In the interview with Rev. Troy in the back of this book, he talks of calling parents of distraught gays who've just come out "to take the temperature of the waters" before actually going to see them in person. Giving a bit of information or clues, then intently watching and listening for reactions, is part of this testing. A good example of this might be bringing up the subject of gay rights. If the person one is testing starts talking about "homosexuals" rather than "gays," one becomes leary of disclosing identity. And, while the overt

reactions given by the family member aren't always foolproof indicators for future reactions, they do give the gay a sense of having some powers of control over the future series of events. An example of how this method isn't foolproof occurred to a friend of mine in Montana a few years ago. After having had dinner in a waterfront restaurant which reminded him of San Francisco due to the young, handsome, and obviously gay waiters and wine stewarts, he mentioned this to a group of his friends as a "testing the waters" sort of thing. One friend replied, "Boy, I'm glad you told me. I'll never go to that place!" Later, when the friend came out to this seemingly homophobic individual, he got nothing but complete acceptance. The individual then explained that his comment about the restaurant was merely a "thing to say" in front of the guys he was with.

Telling my parents has been on my mind quite a bit lately. I'm going down to California to visit them this summer, so I'll probably tell them this summer. I'm taking my lover with me. I'll bring up the subject a couple of times, and then see what their reaction is first. And, if it's good, I'll tell them. And if it isn't, I just won't say anything. I think they have a pretty good idea, though. My father doesn't miss much. I think he's pretty closety himself; I just don't know. I don't want to be rejected by them, and that's a possibility. I don't think it will happen, but it's there.

(Helena)

F. Trying to get the folks to ask.

By far the most intriguing and complex stage setting device used is that seen in the account of Marty. Through the use of giving clues, such as deliberately talking with folks about "alternative lifestyles" or introducing gay friends, the gay person tries to paint the parent into a corner where s-he will be forced to ask, "Are you gay?". The gay can then merely answer "Yes" and then continue the naturalization approach's process of education. Needless to say, this approach requires a great

deal of acting ability, patience, energy, and interaction skills.

In the following account, we see Marty, after he was thrown out of his mother's house for disclosing his gay identity, go to his dad's place. Having tried to get his dad to come out and ask him "the question" for some time without luck, Marty is now determined that tonight's the night.

Kus: How did you go about telling your dad?

Marty: Well, I tried to give a lot of clues for a long time such as not covering up my actions; I wouldn't pretend I was dating a woman. And I would bring home lots of my gay friends who they might perceive as being gay.

Kus: Why would they perceive that?

Marty: Well, some of my friends I brought home would fit into my parents' stereotypes of what gay people are like. Some of them were sort of on the effeminate side. So, through their rather illogical reasoning, they would be correct in this instance of associating effeminacy with gayness. Well in my family, you are assumed to be heterosexual. In my lover's family, you don't have to actually come out and say it. Donovan's folks are able to grasp things without actually coming out and saying I'm gay. But not in mine. I've always been very close to my parents, and I wanted to be honest with them along this way. But no matter what I did to give clues, they simply were blind. So, I'd come home from college for visits, and when I would go back to school, I'd have a very incomplete feeling inside because they didn't know I was gay.

Kus: So how did you eventually tell your dad?

Marty: Well, there were plenty of opportunities to come right out and tell him, but I just didn't have the strength at that time to come out directly. Rather, in lots of our discussions, I would turn the conversation into topics like the psychology of man-loving-man, alternative lifestyles, things like that. I would try to lead him into asking me questions which would allow me to say, "Yes, I'm gay." But he wouldn't bite. So, immediately after my mother threw me out of her house, the wheels were really turning. I went straight over to my dad's house and hopped into one of our discussions, only this time, I was sure it was going to end in the right way (chuckle), that it was going to end with a question from him. And he did finally ask me, and he took it all very rationally. I'm sure he had figured it out long time before, but he never asked because it wasn't something he wanted to hear me say. He said it was a "maladaptive learning process" and things like that, which I tried to counter, but he couldn't hear at

that time. Now that I'm a stronger person and stronger in my gay identity, I never would try to come out in that way again. I'd simply not beat around the bush and just flat come right out and say it. (Marty)

VI. TIMING OR "WHY NOW?"

Based strictly on logical reasoning, one knows that the gay person has the rest of her/his life to tell the folks. This assumes unlimited leisure on the part of the gay person in terms of timing the event.

In actuality, however, both internal and external happenings often clip the wings of the gay's freedom to time the coming out event at leisure. "Internal events" refers to the symbolic interactionist process of self interacting with self. Because self can take itself both as subject as well as object, internal communication can happen. Giving oneself a pep talk is one example. Pete might say, "You know, Pete, you really should get on the ball and tell your family." "You're absolutely right," Pete replies to self, "I'll do it at the very first good opportunity that presents itself." Such thinking may be due to the gay liberation movement (e.g., being around other gays who've told, gay rap groups dealing with telling the folks), a desire to be honest and open and free, improving communications, the works. External events include such things as impending visits or being asked.

This section deals with both internal and external factors involved in "why now?". Included are: trauma with a lover; opportunity; being asked; a visit; intimacy and sharing; folks telling the gay; "it's time;" others tell; and telling as a result and challenge of therapy sessions.

A. Trauma with a lover.

Breaking up is hard to do. Hard for straights and gays, women and men. And while the degree of hurt and quality of coping mechanisms is highly individualistic, there are certain patterns of behavior which exist in persons breaking up with a lover or spouse. Restlessness, decreased appetite (or the opposite), crying, decreased interest in good grooming, increased drinking, all are such signs. For the young person living at home with the folks, parents can often help with doses of sympathy and T.L.C. (tender loving care.) For the straight youth, this is easily accomplished. The young man merely says, "I broke up with Nancy" to get the parental sympathy ball rolling. For the closet gay, on the other hand, in order to receive this sympathy and T.L.C., s-he must first decide to come out so the parent understands the scene of breaking up with a same-sex lover. Thus, usually in a weakened emotional and possibly physical state, the gay person decides "it's time" to tell. Such is the case with Rita, Mike and Xavier.

Kus: How about other relatives?

Xavier: No one else in my family knows that I know of. I had an uncle at the time who knew because he was bisexual and lived in San Francisco. And when he came to visit, he knew immediately what was upsetting me at that particular time. So we corresponded by mail about it, but then he died.

Kus: What was this problem that he knew about immediately?

Xavier: It was a situation I was involved in with someone I loved very deeply in Idaho, who used to come up to Spokane on the weekends, and we'd have lots of fun. And my uncle was visiting us for the holidays. I had been down to see my lover, and I came back emotionally distraught because the big weekend did not turn out quite the way I expected it. So, he figured it out very quickly. 'Cause at that time I was a little less together than I am now. Looking more the "screaming faggot" type than I do now.

And Rita's story:

One morning, about 4 a.m., I went and knocked on my mother's door and said, "I've got to talk with you" right. And my mother says, "Oh, my God!" And she comes into the room and says, "What's wrong?" And I sat there and didn't know how to tell her how horrible I was feeling it, not that I was gay, but that this relationship had broken up which meant so much to me. And she says, "Are you pregnant?" (Laughs) That's mothers' first worry, right, are you pregnant. No, mother, I'm not pregnant. She sighed a sigh of relief, and I said, "No, I've been having this relationship with Fran and we just broke up." And my mother, she really has her stuff together, said, "Just think of it as another experience in your life and learn from it." It just lifted the weight off me. It's probably the best thing she could have said, you know. Fortunately, it didn't make me feel any shame about the gay relationship at all. It felt good from the beginning, and I wanted it to continue. So, I think that was one of the reasons I had no trouble coming out myself. I've never had doubts about the wholesomeness or realness of the gay relationship.

(Rita)

And Mike:

Kus: Did you tell your folks?

Mike: Oh, yes. You asked me earlier if I ever cried? That was the time I cried, when I had to tell my mother. 'Cause I was tired of lying.

Kus: How did you do that?

Mike: I had broken up with a lover. She came into my bedroom when I was very hung over from being out all night at a party in Spokane. And she said, "Mike, what's wrong? What's going on?" And I told her.

B. Opportunity presenting itself.

At times, a conversational opportunity presents itself which leads in naturally to coming out. Persons who take advantage of such opportunities have done previous decision-making which has led to deciding they would eventually come out to the family "in the future sometime." This, then, can be seen as a combination of both internal and external factors working in the coming out decision. Further, the persons taking advantage of these opportunities, at least from my sample, indicate they plan

to do some education after the telling. Such is the case of Mitch and Monty.

Monty's story:

Well, I moved to Seattle and then back to Montana. I found out I had a case of gonorrhea, so I went to the doctor and got that cured. And my mother said, "You didn't tell me about any girls that you've been sleeping with." And I said, "No, it was a guy." She cried the first time I told her, and ever since then, she's tried to understand. And I think she is understanding now that I'm no different, I'm still me. (Monty)

And Mitch's story:

Well, I was planning to create a special situation in which I had some material, some good books for them, and to tell them all at the same time and be all prepared for it. But what happened was spontaneous. I was just up visiting and having coffee with my mother. We were talking about some of my activities in relation to a scholarship I was going to apply for. Some of my activities in leadership were discussed, and she was thinking of some of those for me. And I mentioned that I was involved in an organization on campus. She asked me what it was, and I described the group, which is the organization we formed as the result of gay studies and of which I'm president. And I explained some of the functions of this group, and she said, "Well, Mitch, if you're involved in an organization like that, aren't people going to think that you're queer?" And I said, "Well, mom, I am." And so I told her in that way. She was somewhat shocked. She got up and washed a couple of dishes, and then sat down, mumbling at first, "I don't believe this. Maybe your brother, but not you." [Mitch's brother is also gay.] And then we just tried to talk about it some more. I tried to explain to her my excitement and my happiness as a result of coming out and coming to terms with it. And then the conversation came back to the psychiatric thing. She was reading a book at the time about a woman with 17 personalities, which for some reason, she thought was totally relevant, and she insisted that I take it home and read it right then. And she later brought up a reference to it during a conversation a few days later. "Have you read it?" And she kept talking about "psychiatry works in this case," and finally I said, "Mom, what the hell does a woman with 17 personalities have to do with me? I have just one!" And so I kind of made a few inches in convincing her that I was healthy and she was healthy.

(Mitch)

C. Being asked.

A direct question, "Are you gay?" posed directly to the gay can be answered negatively, positively, or ambivalently ("I'm not sure" or "I'm a bisexual maybe "). Nevertheless, usually by the time a family member is at the stage of asking such a question, the gay has already decided to disclose at some time. It is also interesting to note that for the gay experienced in coming out, knowing what the question will be in advance is very common. A lead such as, "You know, Mary, there is something I've been meaning to ask you. I know it's personal and probably none of my business..." virtually insures the gay'll know what comes next. In fact, gays often break into the question's introduction and say, "Yes, I'm gay." (Which usually then prompts a "How did you know I was going to ask that!" statement of surprise.) The following 3 accounts show the "being asked" phenomenon.

Lonny's story:

Kus: Did you tell your folks or grandparents or whomever?

Lonny: I told them about 2 years ago. I told my aunt and uncle first, and they told me never to tell my grandparents. My grandmother always said she was a psychic, and I agree with her. Because 3 months after I told my aunt, my aunt and my grandmother were having lunch at a restaurant. And my grandmother looked at my aunt and said, "Esther, I have a feeling Lonny's gay." And my aunt just about choked on her lunch. My aunt said, "Well, if he is he hasn't told me" which was a lie because she did know I was. And my grandmother just sat there and said, "Well, if he is, I want him to tell me. And I'm going to ask him." Well, the next time we got alone together, she did ask me, and I told her the truth. She accepted it lightly. She wouldn't dare tell anyone else that she knew it. And she told me of a second cousin she thought was gay. I hadn't seen him since we were 3 or 4 years old. And she said, "Well, by his mother's letters, I read between the lines, and I think Jerry is too." So, she accepted it, but she had a fit about my earring because she thought just

everybody would think I'm gay. Which is wrong. There are many reasons people wear earrings. But she got so emotional about it! She was constantly worrying about me. Am I sleeping all right, am I eating all right, am I being hurt? It worried her I was gay, so she told my grandfather. He said, "If he's happy, let it pass." But I later found out he was what you would call two-faced. He would tell my aunt and uncle, "I'm just so disappointed in Lonny." I just found that out since my grandfather passed away 4 weeks ago. (Lonny)

Vincent's story:

Kus: How did you tell your youngest sister?

Vincent: Well, my sister and the man she's been living with for many years, and who I like a lot, came over to my house over the Christmas vacation. I actually intended to tell her at the time they were coming for a visit. They came for overnight, and that evening I decided to tell them. But, I found that as the evening approached, I wasn't in the mood, the TV was going, and the time was just never opportune. So, the next morning, I decided if not now, I'll never be able to do it. So, we had just eaten breakfast, and I was asking my sister about her job. She's got a job as a women's coordinator at a state university in Oregon. She talked about all the people she comes in contact with, and I found out she has lots of contacts with lesbians in her job and knows gays in her life outside of work. Then she said, "Vince, can I ask you a question?" And I said, "Sure." And I knew when she said that what she was going to ask me. And she said, "Are you gay?" And I immediately replied, "Yes." And she said, "Boy that was quick!" And I said, "Yeah, I fully intended to tell you last night, but there just wasn't room to do it, and I'm glad you asked me." So I gave her a nutshell synopsis of my life and sexual experiences. And she concluded by saying that she's supportive and that it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. Whatever I want and am happy doing is fine with her. And that's the main thing she's concerned with, my being happy. I knew she was going to accept it, I knew she'd feel this way, so I had no qualms in telling her.

Rita:

I have one cousin who's a particularly religious person. Like she really hangs on the Bible. If it says don't eat shrimp, by golly you don't eat shrimp, you know. I was kind of leary of telling her. We had been best friends in high school, and so I felt a close rapport with her, and I wanted to tell her, and she wanted to ask me. In fact, when I went back to Ohio for a visit, she got me drunk one night and I knew she was doing it intentionally. She kept ordering drinks. "Ruth, I can't drink anymore" but she kept on anyway. On the way home she said, "Okay, I want to ask you something." I said,

Rita cont.

"Yeah, I bet I know what it is." (Laughs.) She said, "Well, tell me." And I said, "What is it?" And she couldn't ask me, and said, "Come on, you know what I mean." And I said, "Yes, I'm gay." And she said, "Oh, I'm so glad you told me!" and she hugged me and kissed me. That made me feel real good that I could tell somebody that I liked women and they didn't reject me. (Rita)

D. The visit.

In ROOMMATES CAN'T ALWAYS BE LOVERS: AN INTIMATE GUIDE TO MALE-MALE RELATIONSHIPS, Lige Clark and Jack Nichols answer a young man's query about an upcoming visit:

Dear Lige and Jack,

Next month my mother is coming to visit us for a few days. She doesn't know I'm gay and she's never met my lover, who I'm presently living with. My lover is pretty uptight about having her stay (sleep) here and wants to put her up in a hotel although we have the space available for her comfort. He says we'll have her over for dinner and entertain her royally. I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings; what do you guys do?

Anxiously yours,
Edward T., Cleveland, Ohio

Dear Edward,

Jack's mother sleeps on our king-size bed when she visits and we bed down on a floor mat in the living room. Why is your lover uptight? He hasn't got anything to be ashamed of in front of your Mom, does he? Is he afraid she'll find out? If you don't want to tell your mother about your life simply take care not to hold hands when she's around, stop playing knees under the dining table, and it seems sure that unless your lover says: "Madame, I'd like you to know that I bugger your son with affectionate regularity," she probably won't catch on.

If your lover just can't get himself together for her visit, maybe he should stay in a hotel. So far it's his problem, not yours and not hers. (1974, pp. 139-140)

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a visit by relatives (an external factor) leads to soul-searching (internal factors). For the single gay, such a visit usually is no big deal. For the coupled gay

living with a lover, the decision must be made. Should I tell? Should I tell before they get here or when they're here? Following are two slices of data showing how Ethan and Rita handled the situation.

Ethan:

My mother came to visit me here in Seattle. And I knew that I was going to tell her. And I picked her up at the airport, and I was all nervous and everything, you know. Waiting for the time. We exchanged conversation and sat down for dinner, and maybe three hours later, during the course of the dinner, I told her. And she wasn't surprised either. As a matter of fact, she thought even before I told her and I had accepted I was gay that I was gay. Like she said that she used to clip things out of the newspaper when I was in college to send me, things about homosexuality...I suppose horror stories. But she never sent them. She cried. It was hard for her to hear. I think she worries about what she did and how people might react back home even today. It's a small town and my family's quite well known. So, she worries about that. I'm not quite sure she knows how to handle it. It's a conservative area, and people around there, like in the church, are down on the ERA and down on "homosexuals" and all this kind of stuff. And she knows she has to keep her mouth shut. And it hurts her, you know, when they are talking about how awful "homosexuals" are, and she doesn't know what to do. So, I told her that night, and then I had to go to a board meeting of a gay organization in the city. So, here I just dropped this bomb and left. I kind of felt funny about that. But I gave her some books to read while she was here for a visit, and we talked all the time. And I was seeing a therapist at the time, and I made an appointment for her to go and talk to him and she did. She also went and talked to Carol (another informant in this study) and that helped her a lot. My mother, every now and then, gets kind of down and needs to talk about it. She doesn't have to worry about not being a good mother; she was a great mother. That's one of her worries. And the interesting thing about her trip to see me was that she said, "I'm glad you told me. If you hadn't, I would have asked you." So, I'm glad for her trip and me beating her to the punch!

And Rita:

Let's see. When I was living with a different lover in California, my brother came out to California to visit me at my invitation. And when he got there, I told him. I said "so and so" is my lover, and we've been together for six years or whatever it was, and I don't want you to feel uncomfortable. I told him that if we do anything that bothers you, let me know. So, we went to this party, a gay party, a wild party. And he just fit right in. There's no sexual overtones to him to people that were there. He felt very comfortable and that's when he related to me that he had some gay male

Rita cont.

friends living with him and a gay female. I had assumed he was gay. He's feminine. All of his friends, I could swear to God, are gay. He goes to gay bars with his friends, lives with gays. And so one day I confronted him and he says, "No, I'm not." So, who knows?! I think he just hasn't had any relationships yet. He likes to be around all people, men and women. He's got a great sense of humor. So, I'm thinking maybe he's just "neuter" right now even though he's 22.
(Rita)

In an earlier chapter, we noted that coming out to friends often leads the information receiver to begin sharing secrets and sharing personal intimacies. In a similar way, the sharing of intimacies by the straight person often leads the gay to disclose sexual identity.

Kus: Did you tell your family?

Ethan: Yeah. The first person I told was my older sister. She called me up one time, one afternoon, and we talked at real length about some difficulties she was having, some personal difficulties. And she was being really, really honest with me, and I said, well, this is the time. You know, I just knew in that conversation that she was willing to share those things about herself, so I'd share about me. And I did. And she said, "Well, it doesn't really surprise me. And what's really most important is that you know that you're my brother and I love you. And what I want is for you to be happy. And it seems that you've been happy the last few times you've come to visit, and that's what's most important."

E. Folks telling the gay.

On occasion, the parent tells the child that the child is gay. Almost always this occurs to persons who also know they're gay, have accepted it, and live a gay lifestyle (e.g., living with a lover). Invariably they believe their parents don't know. Such was the case with Cliff. This disclosure shows a purely external factor controlling the timing.

Kus: Did you tell your family?

Cliff: No. My mother told me! She said she had known ever since I

was 18. So, I suggested at the time that she should have told me at 18; it would have made it a lot easier to get along with everything all these years, because I'd been trying to hide the fact. And, if she had told me, we could have had a much closer relationship.

Kus: Did she accept it?

Cliff: Oh, yes. At the time she found out, she started reading books. Of course at that time there wasn't an awful lot written about it. I don't know if my father ever knew or not, but it was never discussed. But my mother knew all along.

Kus: What was the occasion that she said to you that she knew all along?

Cliff: It was at Christmas time about 4 years ago. We were discussing my brother. He's kind of high strung and jumps from one wife to another, and I say maybe he has a problem. And so we got into this conversation and she just plain came out and told me. It was quite a shock at the time (laughs), but we must have talked about 3 hours on the phone. So, ever since then, everything's been open, and she's always liked my friends. We're in contact lots as she lives in town.

Kus: Did she ever tell you how she knew?

Cliff: I really don't know. Through the years all I had in the house were boyfriends and my buddies for fishing and camping and hiking, that kind of stuff. So, even though I didn't say anything or walk around holding hands, it was quite obvious through the close association what I was.

F. Telling folks who already know.

This form of "Why now?" telling is much like #6 above. However, unlike #6, the parents who are wise to the gay's identity do not let on they know until after the disclosure. Consequently, the gay has the leisure of timing. So, we may say this is controlled by internal factors... "It's time." An important feature of this phenomenon is that the parents, by knowing in advance, have already gone through their own coming out - or acceptance - process to some extent at least, and, therefore, don't need as much education as parents in other situations.

The following are 3 examples of this phenomenon. Two are from my informants and one is taken from THE FANCY DANCER by Montana author Patricia Nell Warren. We see that unlike some other types of telling, this one is usually not so traumatic in outcome. In fact, there's a sense of relief knowing that the parent is accepting already.

Carol:

I decided to come out to my parents in '73. There was a kind of understanding there, but I wanted it to be verbal. Because I was very involved in doing a lot of political stuff, speeches, and things like that (in the gay movement). And I thought it would be very unfair to them to hear it third hand, even though they were on the East Coast, you know, and there was a remote possibility...So, on one of my visits home, I told them that. The first thing my father says is, "Do you think we're stupid or something? Your mother and I've been talking about this since you've been 13." Which is kind of cute.
(Carol)

Ethan:

My mother had told my father, and all he said to her was, "What's there to say?" I didn't know where my father was coming from for a year of more, like we'd never talked about it. But he treated me the way he always did, and that's pretty good. But a year ago Christmas, I went back home, and I wanted to talk with him about it to see where he stood. He was reading the newspaper, and so I said, "Are you going to read the paper or are you going to talk to me?" He said okay and put it down. And that time I'd taken home the book A FAMILY MATTER,¹ and I'd given it to my mother to read, and I said I wanted to talk with him about it. And he said, "Oh, yeah, I saw the book," and so I kind of asked him what it was about. And I told him I'm gay. And he said it was something that if it weren't so, he would prefer that. Like, for example, if one of my sisters had gotten pregnant and wasn't married; he would prefer it hadn't happened, but if it did, so what. So, he more or less said, so what. No big deal. And then he went on to share with me that he's

¹A FAMILY MATTER is a brilliantly written book by Dr. Charles Silverstein, co-author of JOY OF GAY SEX. A FAMILY MATTER is a collection of stories about different families and how they took "the news." There are many tidbits of advice for handling coming out to families for gays, family members, and persons who come in contact with gays in a helping sort of way such as nurses, priests, counselors. A "must" reading.

Ethan cont.

run across a lot in his reading. He reads a tremendous amount, kind of a historian. And he was telling me about, you know, all these people from the past (chuckles) like the Krup family in Germany and Michaelangelo and I don't know who else he'd run across. It just wasn't that big a deal. (Ethan)

The Fancy Dancer:

I was sitting there burning alive, playing with my cup.

"Do you think we've been a happy family, Mom?"

"By and large, I think so. The only big disappointment your father and I had was that you didn't get married. Of course we're proud of your accomplishments as a priest, but..."

The moment had come to tell her, too. I realized one doesn't come out all at once. The Bishop was only the first of many bits and pieces.

"Mom, even if I hadn't become a priest, I wouldn't have gotten married. Or maybe I would have gotten married, and then got divorced in a few years."

She was silent for a moment. Then, to my surprise, she said in a low voice, "I know."

"What do you mean you know?" The TV-colored rainbow of hallucination was parting again.

"Your father and I have always known," she said simply.

"When you were a teenager, and you didn't show any interest in girls. Your father and I braced ourselves for all the usual problems. We know what young people are like these days. But...the problems just didn't come. We wanted to think it was because you were such a good boy, but we couldn't. We both knew you were just indifferent, just going through the motions to please us."¹

I had my hand over my eyes.

"You seemed so normal in every other way. Sports, school activities...I mean, if you'd had a lisp or a clubfoot, or something, or if you were frail, we could have thought it was just shyness." My mother was struggling with stereotypes. "But we couldn't find any of those things to blame, so it was the first thing that crossed our minds, that you might be...that way."

"You should have told me," I said.

"Oh, no," said my mother horrified. "You had to find out for yourself. We always wondered when you did, and if you did. And when we saw your young man friend (the Montana Indian fancy dancer), well..." (Warren, 1976, 219-220)

¹Note The Best Little Boy In The World syndrome operating here. TBLBITW syndrome, found in many gay men's accounts of childhood, has been discussed in a previous chapter.

G. Others tell family.

Sometimes other persons tell the family members that their child is gay. In this situation, timing is completely out of the hands of the gay person; timing is controlled by external factors. Following is such an event, the gay then must decide whether to engage in a naturalization approach of education or issue a denial or whatever.

Because of the traditional stigma and often severe negative sanctions against both being gay and engaging in same-sex sexual behavior, persons hostile towards closeted gays have often used exposure as either a form of blackmail or of revenge. The following shows an example of others telling the family as a form of revenge or vindictive behavior resulting from a heterosexual divorce and in-law feelings about it.

Kus: Did you tell your family?

Jon: No. It was something I never could get around to doing, and partly I really didn't feel it was necessary. I have always lived away from home while going to school 300 miles away. After finishing school, I moved 2,000 miles away from them. So, I really saw no need to bring this subject up to them. They didn't know about it until after I separated (divorced) my wife. My wife's mother wrote them a nice nasty letter and my mom had a heart attack. I don't know if it was caused by that, but I'm sure it certainly contributed.

Kus: How did your parents act towards you after the letter?

Jon: Well, my dad and mom never let me know they got the letter for probably a year or better. I was back visiting them at home in New Jersey, and we were sitting watching TV one night. My mother had gone to bed, so my dad and I were alone. It was the first time I had been back home since the divorce. My dad mentioned this letter that my mother-in-law had written about my being homosexual. My dad mentioned that he had always wondered about my wife because she always had a girl-friend hanging around. My wife was probably a lesbian.

(Jon)

H. Result of therapy.

Skip's account here shows how the challenge of therapy led him to disclosure timing. As gay liberation affects more persons, and as the number of visits to gay therapists and gay rap groups increases, it could be hypothesized that coming out timing will be greatly influenced by such therapy and other self-growth group experiences. This is an example of an external factor (therapy) leading to an internal factor ("It's time") in timing. Further, timing and the disclosure can be practiced with the therapist or group ahead of time, one can look forward to sharing "what happened" with members of the group or therapist after the event, and one can get some advice on good and bad ways of coming out.

Kus: Have you told your folks?

Skip: No. I still worry about what would happen to my parents and when to tell them.

Kus: Have you thought about this a great deal?

Skip: Only when I have to. I'd like to get it off my chest. My mother is gay. I haven't really gotten around to telling her yet. She left me at a really early age, so I still have some animosity towards her. But, I did tell my sister about 3 weeks ago.

Kus: How did you do that? Tell me the whole thing from start to finish.

Skip: Well, this really kind of started with my counselor. He wanted me to get down to certain situations I was afraid of. Coming out to my family was definitely one of them. So, he asked me to write down the very worst thing that could happen to me. So, when I was talking with my sister on the phone later on after this session, we were discussing my mother. My mother has a bone disease of the back, and she's going to need somebody around her. She's living by herself about 150 miles from my sister and a long way from me; they still live in the Midwest. I asked my sister why she thought my parents got divorced, because I had asked my dad that, and my dad told me that my mother was gay. So, I asked my sister why she thought they had got a divorce. She said, "I don't really know, but I've got a good idea." And I said, "Yes, mom's gay, and so am I." And my sister was silent for

Skip cont.

a minute or so, and she says, "Why did you tell me about you?" Well, I explained that I really wanted to get it off my chest. And she said, "I feel like what you do in your own house is your own business," and the conversation continued on about my mother, and nothing was really said about me. I haven't talked with her since then, but I would like to. I would really like to go to visit her to see what her reactions really would be. Over the phone is one thing, but in person might be something else because I told her not to tell anyone else. She didn't seem to mind too much on the phone, but you never know. (Skip)

VII. SOME INITIAL REACTIONS.

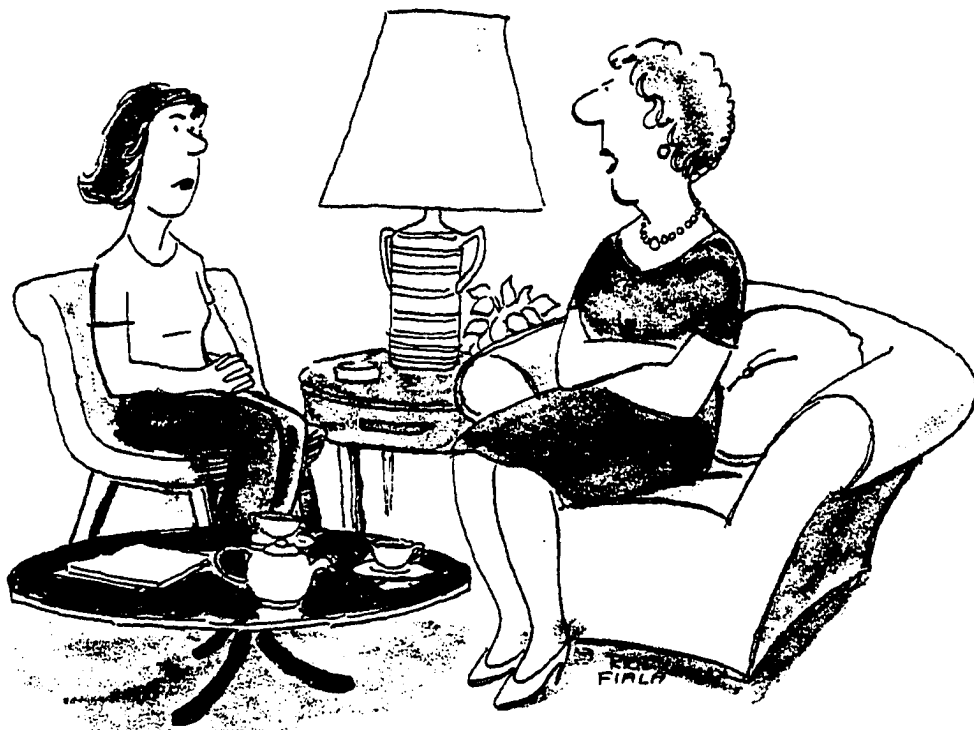
This study is solely from the gay perspective. Parents have not been interviewed. Nevertheless, because of the importance which initial parental reactions have on the gay persons coming out, gays' accounts on initial family reactions are presented here.

Some parents are able to accept rather readily, while others have a more difficult time initially with "the news."

...some non-gay parents would like to be good parents to their gay offspring. When a person discloses gay identity to a parent, it is almost always in the hope of ending secrets and strengthening the parent-child bond. Parents often cry and feel wounded, wondering how they can deal with this tragedy - forgetting that their child, having much less experience in weathering life's storms, has had to deal with it alone, suffering in secret silence, and now offers to help them learn that the presumed "tragedy" can become an easy, even happy, fact of life. These parents who have been blinded by too many years of prejudice would like to be good parents, but they can't.

But lots of parents can. They know intuitively and from experience that a youngster grows best in the warmth of unconditional love, the air of trust, and the light of truth. Parental manipulation, guilt induction, and a family full of secrets produce kinks and scars. (Clark, 1979, pp. 60-61)

The initial family reaction, especially if it is negative, should not be seen as static as will be shown in the next section. In THE SPADA



"If your purpose in telling me you're a lesbian is to dissuade me from insisting on a white dress when you forget this nonsense and get married, I assure you that, on that matter, I remain firm."

REPORT, which is a compilation of findings from a survey of 1,038 gay American men, Spada reported that:

1. Slightly more men have told their family than have not. Of those who have, almost twice as many report good reactions as bad.
2. For 25% of the men who told, the family's reaction was highly negative.
3. Many men report that while their family's initial reaction was negative, the situation was improved. [This indicates the coming out process of the family]
4. Some men have encountered a mixed reaction.
5. Nearly half the men in this survey have not told their family. Most of these have kept their feelings to themselves out of fear.
6. Some men are content not to tell their family.
7. Others are unhappy that they do not feel able to reveal themselves. (1979, pp. 43-52)

In this section, we take a glimpse at ten common reactions of the family: ho-hum; guilt; hell in a handbasket; going to the shrink; being thrown out; pleas to "don't tell anyone else;" just a phase; parent helping parent; emotional/physical reactions; and considering the gay dead.

A. Ho-Hum.

In some instances, initial parental reaction appears to be neither here nor there. The reaction can be said to be "ho-hum." What the parents may have said behind their child's back is unknown as this is outside the scope of this study. Following are two examples of this type of reaction. In the first instance, Helena, after carrying out her plan to "test the waters" while home on vacation with her lover, reported back to me after her trip.

Well, I did test the waters, so to speak, while I was at home with my parents. Marie, my lover, and I were inseparable, so that was the

Helena cont.

first clue. Later we got into a discussion of the course we were taking, and we got around to talking about our gay studies course in sociology. My parents seemed real interested and asked lots of questions. So, anyway, we told them. They asked a few questions like were we planning on living together, will we be coming home for visits in the future, are we happy. They didn't seem to be blown away at all. In fact, they seemed rather blase and accepting of the whole thing. Of course, I'm sure that their liking Marie had a good deal to do with their acceptance. I'm glad it's over! (Helena)

And Xavier:

Kus: Why did you tell your parents?

Xavier: Well, I came out to them in 1966 or '67. I just felt that I finally had to do it because my mother and I were very close. We were super good friends besides her being my mom. So, I wanted her to share it with me. And I knew if I told her, she would share my life with me in so much because she'd be happy for me and everything. So, I told them both individually, not as a pair.

Kus: Did you plan a special occasion to tell them?

Xav.: No, I just finally got up the nerve. They were 3 blocks away at my aunt's house, and I called up and told my mother that I wanted to talk to her. So, she came out and I told her, and she went back and then my dad came up and I told him.

Kus: What were their reactions?

Xav.: My mother's reaction was very quiet because I told her, basically, why I felt this had happened to me. My dad was just non-committal on it. I don't think he really accepted it, but he just kind of ignored the whole situation. He was always very close to me thereafter, but he just kind of ignored the idea. My mother just said if it makes me happy, it makes her happy. I can't even remember what my dad's actual verbal reaction was to it. I know he wasn't hostile or anything like that, but I can't recall any reaction from him.

Kus: Would you say that coming out to them produced any positive or negative things in your relationship with them?

Xav.: I think nothing really. Things went on just the way they were. I personally felt, though, like I didn't have to explain myself for my actions like I did before I told them. I think that after I told my mother, it was a little easier for her to accept the fact that I might move around a little bit more often than people normally do. I guess that's about it. There wasn't that much of a change in family life-style.

B. Guilt.

In the second section of this chapter which dealt with "deciding not to come out," it was noted that many gays choose not to tell as they feel their parents will feel guilty that they did something wrong in child-rearing. There is, to date, no scientific proof that parental child-rearing practices influence the formation of sexual orientation, be it gay or straight. Nevertheless, in many of the accounts seen throughout this chapter, expressions of parental guilt abound and seem to be nearly universal initial reactions. And because this feature is found in so many accounts shown in other sections of this chapter, there is no need to give an example here.

C. Hell in a handbasket.

For parents steeped in traditional Judeo-Christian religious beliefs, the notion that their child will go to hell is often an initial reaction and one which is most depressing and frightening. This appears to be especially true of those in fundamentalist Protestant sects. Often such persons have what Adorno and others refer to as authoritarian personalities (Adorno, et.al., 1950) which leads to seeing homosexuality as "total evil", i.e., not merely "sinful" but also "sick." With this world view, attempts at "curing the sickness" are made to "save the sinner" from hell for God. Anita Bryant's "ministries" in Florida is seen by many as an excellent action example of this type of thinking.¹

¹For a vivid account of one man's experience, see Joe Baker's "Inside Anita's ministries of guilt" in THE ADVOCATE, April 19, 1979, pp. 18-23.

Vincent: ...but they got into the religious issue of it and told me that I was going to hell for all eternity if I didn't mend my ways. And they told me that they considered this the most heinous sin that a person could commit. They also treat it as a disease, something you can get over.

Kus: What did your mom do after she said that she wasn't surprised?

Vince: She didn't offer too much to the conversation. She listened mostly. My dad, though, did lots of talking. He told me about a "former" gay who is now counseling other gays and has written an article which has appeared in the CHRISTIAN LIFE magazine. The title of the article was "Homosexuality: A conspiracy." And I read it because my mom laid it out one morning for me to see and read. Anyway, my parents' thinking was just like the article. They said that this is one of Satan's ways of getting to people and, since it is in that magazine, it must be right. CHRISTIAN LIFE is constantly telling their readers that Christian families are not immune to these problems, and that is Satan's way of getting to the children of the family.

Kus: Your parents believe in Satan?

Vince: Yes, absolutely! They're very fundamentalist Protestants. Like I say, my dad and mom both feel that it's like a disease or a bad habit that you can change if you want to. That night I told them, they wanted to rush me to this "former" gay so I could talk to him and get changed. I said I didn't want to be changed. First, it's not possible. And second, I told them I'm happy in my lifestyle. I told them I didn't want that kind of pressure, and I wouldn't respond to it at all. I told them that either they learn to accept me the way I am or forget it. But I certainly didn't want any interference.

Kus: Did they continue with the religious trip in the future?

Vince: Well, my dad told me several days later that he had talked to some people at Burden Bearers, which is a Christian Counseling Center. The recommendation of the counselors was that my parents shouldn't do any further discussion of the gay issue at all. They told them it was my life and my way to deal with it. So, my folks said they wouldn't discuss it anymore. They still bring it up, though. My mom is convinced that I'm going to rid myself of this terrible disease that I have. At Christmas she talked about when I get married, a heterosexual marriage, I'll be happy. After the initial reactions, they did say they love me still. But ever since then, it's been more difficult for my dad to show his affection for me. I can see sort of holding back.

D. Going to the shrink.

In the very recent past, due to the psychiatric and clinical psychological professions' idea that gays were inherently "sick" or "abnormal" or "maladjusted," psychiatric treatment was often indicated for the gay coming out. As the gay movement advances and education of the masses begins permeating the common people, one would imagine that "sending the kid to the shrink" as an initial parental reaction would decrease. But, old ideas die slowly. Here is an account of being sent to a psychiatrist during World War II; accounts of younger gays in my sample do not report this phenomenon, thus indicating the movement's progression.

Kus: What happened when you were a kid to make your mom think you were gay?

Tim: My mother knew because she was carting me to a psychiatrist in San Francisco to find out what was wrong with me. I went through some very interesting experiences I can tell you about, and so could my mother! But, I would say that when I was 14 or 15, I said to myself, "Well, this is it. I'm gay." Now that I look back, I've always been gay.

Kus: Why was your mother taking you to a psychiatrist?

Tim: Well, just previous to World War II, she had divorced my father and put me into a home. The only incident I remember was one of the kids and I went up in the hills. And we got to fooling around, and he told his mother about it, and his mother told the woman in charge of the home. And the next thing I knew, WHOOSH! Off to the psychiatrist I go; something must be wrong with him!

E. Being thrown out.

Certainly one of the most dramatic and traumatic initial reactions to coming out is being thrown out of the house. Fortunately, this a rather uncommon reaction. Because the parents weren't interviewed, one wonders if being thrown out of the house was unique to the gay issue or

whether such behavior was a common coping mechanism which would have also been employed if the child was, for example, having a baby out of wedlock or quitting school.

In the first account, we see not only being thrown out as an initial reaction, but also we see other gays being blamed for Marty's gayness. The parent, not realizing apparently that sexual orientation is determined in the first years of life - if not sooner, tends to see Marty as an innocent lamb led astray by a flock of black sheep. Interestingly enough, this type of folk theory was not found in any of the accounts except for this one:

Kus: What happened when you told your mom?

Marty: Well, I took a friend of mine who was gay and who I had sexual relations with in West Virginia back to school one night which was 200 miles from where I lived in West Virginia. So I returned home and was very tired and everything. And I came to my mother's house - my parents are divorced and live separately. And I came to my mother's house and she was sitting in the kitchen. And she had put two and two together. I had been staying out with my friend four nights in a row, and she figured that he was a gay person. So she came right out and asked me directly in a rather angry manner. She was really angry about it. And once the question was posed directly to me, I was able to say, "Yes, I am." [Note that Marty spent lots of time trying to get his dad to pose the question also.] And it was a very terrible experience. It was good to get it out, but she didn't handle it well at all. She cried and told me it was the worst thing in the world and kicked me out of the house. My father is fairly open-minded and can listen to new ideas. But my mother is very closed minded, very stubborn, and she has confused a "strong will" with a "closed mind" somewhere along the line.

Kus: Did she get over this initial reaction?

Marty: She only went to pieces for that day. And then she accepted me. But, she went through a fairly long period of about 3 years where she accused all my gay friends of causing me to be gay and transferring all the blame from me to my friends. So, by doing this, she could accept me while not accepting my being gay.



"Hello, Benny. It's your mother. I only have a minute. Get married, have children. Goodbye."

In the second little account, a young man who I'll call Paul arrived late one rainy and windy Seattle night from a small Montana town to my house in Seattle with his sleeping bag, books, and all the belongings he could carry.

Well, I told my folks that I was gay, and my father told me to pack up and leave town. He just was elected to be president of the local Chamber of Commerce, and he didn't want me around to be an embarrassment to him. That's why I moved to Seattle. I figured you could put me up for the night, and then I'll move in with some gay Montanans who live here.
(Paul)

Both Paul and Marty were eventually welcomed back to their parents' homes after the initial reaction wore off.

F. "Don't tell anyone else!"

In the preceding account of Paul's being evicted from his home, we saw parental concern for reputation in the community. It is a well documented fact in gay literature that many families in the past years have supported their gay children on the condition that they live in a distant city and not "embarrass" them in their own community and/or family. The financial support was actually a bribe. The extent of this "out of sight" financial support deal today is unknown. However, due to our highly mobile society, and due to the fact that many gays deliberately move far away from home to come out, one might expect this is decreasing. In any case, some parents' initial reaction is "don't tell anyone else." This "what would the neighbors think?" attitude indicates they would be ashamed of their "tainted" offspring. And, given the extent of guilt found in these accounts over child-rearing, one could assume they would like the skeleton to be kept in the closet so others wouldn't know of

their "failure as parents." When parents express concern for themselves over that of their child in initial reactions, both hurt and anger can result on the part of the gay as seen in this account:

Kus: Besides your dad's religious objections, did he have any other initial reactions he shared with you?

Vincent: Oh, yes. My dad's initial reaction was total silence, then the talk about religion followed. But almost the first thing he was considering was how those closest associates of his were going to react to this.

Kus: This was what you were thinking he was thinking?

Vince: I could see that the concern was not for me, but more for him. And he very shortly came right out and said, "Who are you going to tell?" And I said that I already told a good friend of mine and that he and mom were the second to know. And I went on that I intended to tell the rest of the family and my closest friends. My dad's immediate reaction was that he didn't think that was wise, that I should keep it to myself. Further, at one point in the conversation, he said, "You can be assured that we're not going to tell anyone else." He later made a point of telling me that I was deliberately trying to hurt them by telling other members of the family and my friends.

Kus: Did he eventually come to see your side of wanting to tell others in the family?

Vince: Well, they have closed the door to discussion about my gayness on the advice of Burden Bearers. But, at one point, I was going to be on television in connection with a gay project I was helping with. And his immediate reaction was, "Oh, you are going to kill your parents." And I said, "Dad, you didn't even let me finish! I'm not going to be saying I'm gay, just that I'm working on this social service project in the gay community." That was a reactionary statement on his part and it made me mad!

G. Just a phase.

Because parents see their children through all the usual stages of growth and development, they are used to the notion of "s-he's just going through a phase." And so it is for some parents upon hearing their child is gay. And unlike the other initial reactions, this one allows the

parents to defer statements of reaction and allows them to defer to another day their coming out process.

The following account of Terry's shows the "just a phase" reaction. Terry, a high school graduate not in college, began hanging out with college students taking gay studies courses. His coming out process was in "leaps and bounds." From the stage of identification to the stage of acceptance took about one week. Within 2 weeks, he had a lover. A few months later, he moved to Seattle and was found working as a waiter in a gay restaurant/lounge. And because he wanted very much to "live the movement," he jumped in to tell the folks long before he much information with which to use in a naturalization approach to coming out...but he had lots more written material than many gays do.

Well, I told my mother first. I never really told my father; I knew it would get to him eventually. I just told her that I think I'm gay, and I'd like her to read some information that I could offer her, but she refused. And she also refused to accept the fact that I was gay. And if by chance I was, I could get help and not be gay anymore. But I realized that it wasn't possible as I feel that I was born that way, and I think that maybe in time they'll understand this isn't just a phase I'm going through. But as for right now, I have to live a separate life; my gay side and then my parents'.

(Terry)

H. Parents helping parents.

What happens after the bomb is dropped and the discussion with the child ends? Do parents talk between themselves? Give each other support? Such would be an interesting study. In the following account of Jon's, we see one parent helping the other understand what's going on. This information was gained after the fact, i.e., Jon learned of this parent helping parent about a year after his mother-in-law wrote his parents

that he was gay. In no account, to my amazement, was the "parent helping parent" dialog engaged in while the gay was present.

My mother was naturally very upset when she first got the letter, but my father explained to her a lot of things. He mentioned a couple of people they both knew and that they were homosexuals. So, she accepted it. I guess it really shows the love that parents can have. I don't think either one of them really understands the whole situation. I don't think anyone can. But, I think that by my dad's showing my mother people they both knew and liked and pointing out they were gay, my mother was helped. Every little bit of information can help.
(Jon)

I. Emotional/physical problems.

Earlier in this chapter, Jon mentioned that when his mother received the revenge letter from his mother-in-law announcing his gay identity, she had a heart attack. His statement:

My wife's mother wrote them (mom and dad) a nice nasty letter, and my mother had a heart attack. I don't know if it was caused by that, but I'm sure it certainly contributed.

indicates a certain sense of wonderment: Did I or didn't I cause that by my gay identity (or coming out). Because of the possibility of physical and/or emotional problems, many gays don't tell their parents and especially their grandparents.

The following account of Mike's (who told his mother after his trauma in breaking up) shows how emotional breakdowns can occur. Notice the rather ambivalent statements about his role in the etiology of the breakdowns.

Kus: Did your mom accept it (the telling)?

Mike: No. No. Not ever. Not even now. She just says please be quiet. Let's not talk about it. I don't want our friends to know. And she's stupid, because they all know.

Kus: Did you ever take your lover home to meet her?

Mike: Well, that's a touchy one. To be honest, my ex-lover is now

.

my roommate. But she did meet him. She came to Seattle when she had her first nervous breakdown and lived with us for awhile. And my lover, roommate, whatever, did not get along. They fought constantly. Nothing about gay life, just how the house was run, where the plants were sitting, where the chairs were; they just fought all the time. She finally demanded to go back to Eastern Washington.

Kus: Do you think the actual coming out was better or worse than you anticipated?

Mike: My mother had three nervous breakdowns.

Kus: Because of that?

Mike: Yes. She's never been the same. She became a complete psychiatric case. And I don't feel it's my fault, because I think she probably would have had one anyway, but it brought it to a head. But, you know, that's just my experience. I wouldn't say that for other people. Some people might find that if they told their parents, they'd accept them well, and it would be all over. It would be fine.

J. Zap! You're dead!

Even more extreme than being thrown out of the house, is being thrown out and then considered dead. Traditionally, Jewish families, especially Orthodox Jews, hold a sitting shiva upon learning their child is gay. This 7-day period is also conducted for those marrying outside the faith. Once over, the gay is then officially considered dead...for good.

Although there were no examples from my informants' accounts of this profound phenomenon, I present the following story from Dr. Howard Brown's autobiography, FAMILIAR FACES HIDDEN LIVES. The religion of this family is unknown.

Tim's [Tim is gay] older brother, back from Vietnam, and his younger sister were watching a movie on television with their parents and grandmother when, during a program break, an announcer said that the news that night would include a special report on gay liberation. Tim's brother and sister were aware of his activities with the GAA (Gay Activists' Alliance). His brother even attended a GAA meeting and had come all the way from urging Tim to see a psychiatrist to accepting and supporting him. As soon as the movie was over, Tim's

brother tried to change the channel. But his parents wanted to see that special report. The program included shots of gay activists in three different parts of the city. Tim's brother recalls that during the first episode his father muttered: "The fags should be put in a boat and bombed." The last episode began with a shot of Tim declaring that there were twenty million homosexuals in America and that Mayor Lindsay had better come out strongly for gay civil rights before attempting to become President. Tim's brother said that their father's initial reaction was: "He was the first kid in the neighborhood to like niggers, the first kid to stop eating grapes, the first kid to come out against the Vietnam war, and now he's the first kid to support the queers. It's just a phase. He'll outgrow it." He could not believe that a son of his was a homosexual.

Before Tim's next visit home, for his sister's sweet sixteen party, his parents questioned his brother and sister and concluded that they had "a fag in the family" after all. When he appeared at the party, his father remarked: "Son, if you want to be queer as a three-dollar bill, that's your business." Tim walked away without saying a word. Then his mother approached him. She put her arm around his shoulders. Tim took this to mean that she was going to accept him. "Tim," she said, "I've made only one mistake in my life." Tim asked her what she meant. "Twenty-two years ago," she said, "I should have had an abortion." Since then, Tim's mother has taken to telling neighbors and friends that he is dead. And Tim's father speaks to him as if he were a complete stranger when Tim calls to speak to his sister or brother. (1976, pp. 80-81)

VIII. INTERACTIONAL CHANGES.

Coming out is a profound affirmation of a most radical identity transformation for a gay person. Likewise, when parents and other family members learn of the gay identity, they too must undergo a profound change in how they see their daughter or son, sister or brother. Based on this new knowledge, family members undergo their own coming out process which takes many forms and levels of commitment. The ideal, from the gay and mental health perspectives, is that the family members will go from simple identifying to tolerating to acceptance. Dr. Charles Silverstein says:

The Chinese symbol for "crisis"...is a combination of two other symbols meaning "danger" and "opportunity." Every family crisis represents a danger to the stability of the family and a severe challenge to all its members. But the same crisis also represents an

opportunity for the family to change and grow as the lives of its members change and grow...Each person in the family has a crucial contribution to make. Whether the crisis will bring more danger or more opportunity depends on all of you. (1977, p. 11)

Parental coming out, I've discovered, is unidirectional. In other words, parents move in the direction of acceptance (if they're moving at all, and most often they are moving); I found no example in literature nor from my informants' accounts showing a parent going from acceptance to non-acceptance. This is a profound finding indeed!

With the progression of the familial coming out process, certain interactional changes are noted indicating increased understanding of the gay phenomenon and acceptance of such. In this section, five interaction changes will be briefly discussed: meeting gay friends; joking and learning the lingo; meeting the lover; in-law behavior; and finally a look at the "little things" indicating a process working in the family member.

A. Meeting gay friends.

When Dr. Luke in this study was asked to give some hypothetical advice to gays who want their parents to accept them, he said parents should meet other gay people. Lots of them. The more the merrier! Because in this way, prejudice will be reduced faster than by reading hundreds of books or attending numerous lectures. Many Americans believe that they "don't know any gay people" or "have never met one." This is, of course, virtually impossible. What they're saying is, "I don't know any open gay people." Consequently, by interacting with known gays, acceptance can come easier and the process speeded up. And, as acceptance comes, interaction with gay friends and children becomes more free-flowing and

spontaneous. Here is a new dimension which family members can share with the gay family member - friends.

In the following account (the whole of which appears in the back of this book) of Carol's, we see how friends helped change her parents' ideas of gays. Having had many problems accepting their daughter's lesbian identity and lifestyle, the parents accepted an offer to visit Carol and her lover Evelyn in Seattle.

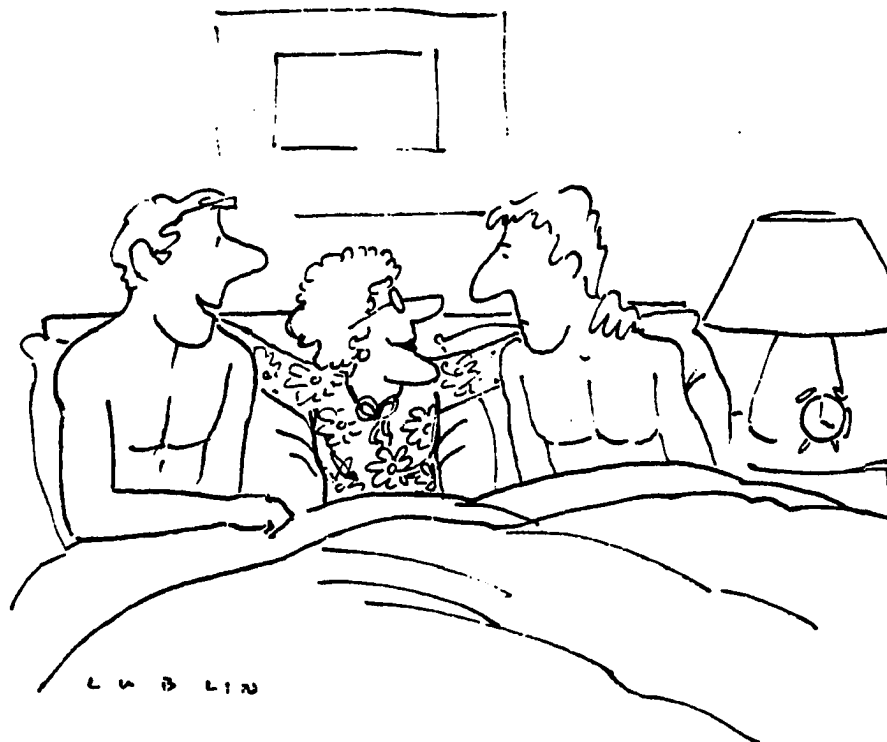
Carol: So, they came out to Seattle to visit and it was just great. They met many of our friends, and they loved everybody they met. They saw us [Evelyn and Carol] together, they saw how we lived, and they saw that it was really kind of a neat life. And my mother came into the bedroom the morning before they left and said to us, "I want to apologize to you Evelyn, for any kind of negative thoughts that I've had about the two of you." And she said, "I feel somewhat regretful of the time that was wasted, but I did need to do some changing." And she apologized to us for that, and she said, "And your great friends, it would just be wonderful to go any place in the world with your friends!" My father put it a little more succinctly (laughter). He said, "Sure glad you're not running around with crumbs." (Laughter) They had the best time of their lives. Every phone conversation they still talk about it.

And later Carol said:

We'd just visited when Evelyn got sick, and I was in the kitchen and my mother came out and said, "You know Carol, someday I'm going to be able - I don't think it's going to be too long - but someday I'm going to be able to go to church and when people say "How's your daughter?" I'm going to be able to say, "My daughter's a homosexual, and she's very happy about this." (Laughter) We told her not to.

B. Joking and learning the lingo.

In Goffman's terminology, the "wise" are those persons with a courtesy stigma. Because of their acceptance and identification with the stigmatized person, they may tell "in" jokes and interact with the stigmatized person in his/or her group's own special language. And when a



"When Mother accepts something, she goes all the way."

relative begins joking and learning the lingo of the gay world, the coming out process is moving right along for the relative.

Kus: Tony, of all your relatives that know you're gay, which is the one that you think accepts your being gay the most?

Tony: My Catholic grandparents.

Kus: Do you ever talk to them about your lover Jon?

Tony: Every time I call them, I talk to them about him and how our lives are going here. My grandmother kids around and says, "Ah, you're the housewife again I see." That's because I'm not working at present. And they're always asking how he's doing and how's work and everything. Every time I talk to them, Jon's name always comes up. He's never been excluded from our conversation. One time when I had a tiff with Jon, I packed up and left him and went to my grandparents' house. My grandmother said, "Get yourself back to that wonderful man of yours and make up!" I can remember when I told my grandmother. She knew beforehand, she said, because when I went to chef school, she recalled my past behavior. I'd always helped out when we had family reunions to clean up the dishes and stuff like that. And I'd always sit and watch her and my great grandmother do embroidery, and they taught me how to do embroidery and crocheting and all. And she said that she knew that I was going to be "different"...that's the way she puts it. She's learning all the little jargon and slang words that the gay community has.

C. Meeting lovers.

Usually when parents meet their child's lover, an increase in acceptance takes place.¹ One wonders, for example, if Mark's father, who received Mark's Dear Dad letter, would have accepted Mark's gayness better if he had known the men Mark was bringing home were his lovers.

After being banished from home and out of touch with his family for about 3 years, Tony reports on his parents' coming out process via loving

¹For a beautifully written story showing this dynamic in action, see Dr. Charles Silverstein's discussion of the 'Carlton Family' - Chapter 5 - in A FAMILY MATTER: A PARENTS' GUIDE TO HOMOSEXUALITY. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977.

his lover.

Tony: My mom slowly got back in contact with me. My grandmother accepted it, and she kind of helped my parents wade through it all. My mom accepted it first and would write now and then, but my father was totally against it and said there'd be no communication. I was the black sheep of the family, so that's one reason why I put 3,000 miles between us. Slowly, they came around to accepting the way I was, that I was going to be this way. And it was at that time that Jon and I started going together. We got married¹ and went back East last summertime, and they accepted him and made him feel more part of the family than I was. They accept it quite easily now.

Kus: Even your dad? (...who had kicked him out)

Tony: Yeah. My dad was really friendly with Jon when we were back there. He goes to the bar a lot, and we were down there watching pitch horse one day, and dad was really nice and introduced Jon and myself to all his friends, all the people I was raised up with.

Kus: How did he introduce you?

Tony: "This is Jon, my son's roommate." He didn't come out totally. But both my parents have accepted it pretty well, and my mom has been very friendly to Jon. Last summer, my dad had to go to the hospital for an operation. Against his wishes, Jon went back there with me. My dad thought it would be too much for my mother to accept all this when he was going to the hospital. My mother asked me to bring Jon with me. It was just going to be for a day or two, and then Jon was going to go down to visit his folks, so he wasn't going to stay there the whole time I was there. My mom met him, she liked him, and I think this helped her a little better accept the whole situation. And since then, she has been very friendly. She always inquires about how he is, how he's doing, and she treats us the same as if we were a straight relationship. My dad and mom send Christmas cards, Christmas presents, and it has really been great. And both of us appreciate it very, very much.

¹"Married" here refers to a service of a "Holy Union" performed in the Metropolitan Community Church. Most mainline churches still do not perform gay unions.

D. In-law behavior.

Probably the most significant sign of acceptance of the gay person is the treating of his or her lover as an in-law. Being kind to a child's "friend" becomes being kind to "one of the family." This was seen to a significant extent in the above account, and it's especially significant when one considers that these are the folks who threw Tony out of the house and weren't in communication with him for 3 years! Following are two brief accounts showing a moving towards this type of behavior by family. Rita's shows behavior already happening which will probably lead to in-law behavior, and Ethan's is what he thinks will happen in the future based on his sister's response.

Rita:

Like when my mom writes me letters, she will ask how is Karen, how's the cat. I don't know if that's her way of showing interest or if she really thinks she should be motherly towards this other person. She always sends cards and Christmas gifts to us both and remembers birthdays. Like whenever I call, she always asks how is Karen, how are things going. I know that she knows. In fact, the last letter I received a couple of days ago said, "It's so nice here in Ohio this week that I wish it were like this nine months out of the year. If it were, I know that you would probably want to move back here." Wishful thinking, right? So, she knows that I'm not going to be back there, that I'm going to be here with Karen. She knows.
(Rita)

Ethan:

I guess my mother told my younger sister after my mom had come out to visit me. Anyway, my younger sister called me up and said it wasn't any big deal. And when I was visiting her one time, she said, "Well, you know, I've thought about this and I've come to deciding that if you're ever to visit me with a lover, that I would make up one bed for you both." So, it kind of indicated to me her level of acceptance.
(Ethan)

E. Big little things.

It's often the little things that families do which are perceived as "major" or "big" by the gay person. Ceasing to ask "When are you going to get married?" is such an example. Little things are often the most visible early signs that families are progressing in their coming out process, and this can be often seen immediately after disclosure.

One Saturday night, a friend of mine who was visiting Seattle from San Francisco for a few days, said to me, "You know, Bob, I'm thinking of telling my folks I'm gay tonight." The next evening when I saw him, he gave the following account:

Well, I did tell them after dinner. They took it pretty well actually. My father was worried that if I was open, it would affect my career advancement. My mother was just concerned that I wouldn't be happy. Because of my profession (in health), I assured my dad that I'd have no problems with that, and I told my mom I'm very happy and that they're both great parents. After that, I went out to my car to smoke a joint to relax. Then, earlier this evening, my mom came to the door saying she was just in the neighborhood - like the neighborhood where I'm staying is nowhere near their house! - and thought I'd like some fresh fruit she just got at Pike Place Market on sale. She figured I'd like them to snack on for my trip back to San Francisco tomorrow. Isn't that cute? It was so sweet of her to do. I'm very happy. (Sailor)

IX. A NOTE ABOUT SIBLINGS.

Throughout this chapter, most attention has been given to telling the parents and their reactions. Siblings have been noted, but they've been given a back seat in the discussions. And so it is in gay studies literature. It's not that telling siblings is not seen as important to the gay person, but rather, telling brothers and sisters is most often not seen as such an earth-shattering event to the gay person.

In this final section of the family chapter, I make a few observations about both straight and gay siblings.

A. Straight siblings.

As a child moves through childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood, s-he often forms a special, lasting sibling bond with brothers and sisters. They come from the same home environment, have the same parents. In many ways they're in the same boat. And once the children get through the tattletale stages and into adolescence, their special bond is cemented further; they are privy to the innermost secrets of each others' sexual experimentations and peccadillos.

Because of the sibling bond indicated in whatever-you-do-don't-tell-mom-and-dad phenomenon, gays often chose to test out coming out first to their brothers and sisters.

Another important observation uncovered in both my research and in gay literature is the fact that parental reaction is not necessarily an accurate indicator as to how siblings will react to gay disclosure. Siblings are not only easier to tell than parents in general, but they most often are the first in the family to be accepting. It is most noteworthy that no informant's siblings ever kicked the gay out of her/his home nor cut off communication.

Q. Is there a significant generalization to be made about the reactions of brothers or sisters of a boy who's come out?

A. Yes. They're often the first to know. In fact, your son may have had some tight talks with a sister or brother of his before he ventured to tell you. And if the siblings are in roughly the same age group, the chances are they will react with greater understanding than you are able at first to muster. Further, it is not uncommon in a large family for him to have a brother or sister also on the same course. I have never known or heard of

a brother or sister of a gay boy who outright rejected him. I have known many families where a gay boy was the most admired and respected member, and often the person to whom the others turned for sympathy and advice with their problems.

(Loomis, 1977, p. 116)

After coming out to parents who "go to pieces" at the disclosure, or after having a row about some aspect of a gay issue with the parents, siblings often find themselves in a rescuing role. In CONSENTING ADULT, for example, after a major battle with his dad over psychiatric bills associated with his gayness (and non-acceptance of such), Jeff (the gay) flees his parents' place to his sister Margie's house. There Margie and her understanding husband Nate provide the welcomed bourbon and T.L.C. (Hobson, 1975, pp. 119-124). In the account of the young man's parents who consider him dead seen earlier in this chapter, we see it's the brother and sister who provide the link between the gay son and the family.

One might hypothesize that due to siblings' more rapid acceptance of the gay's disclosure and their supportive role, siblings might very well be the instruments in keeping the family together where parents cut off communication for long periods of time (as did Tony's parents) while they undergo their own personal coming out process. Such would be an interesting study.

B. Gay siblings.

Although the role played by siblings in general has gotten short shrift in the literature, a new interest is developing in the notion of

more than one gay child in a family.¹

The following are three examples of gays disclosing to gay siblings found in Lenny Giteck's "Gay siblings: All in the family" in THE ADVOCATE, May 29, 1980, p. 15):

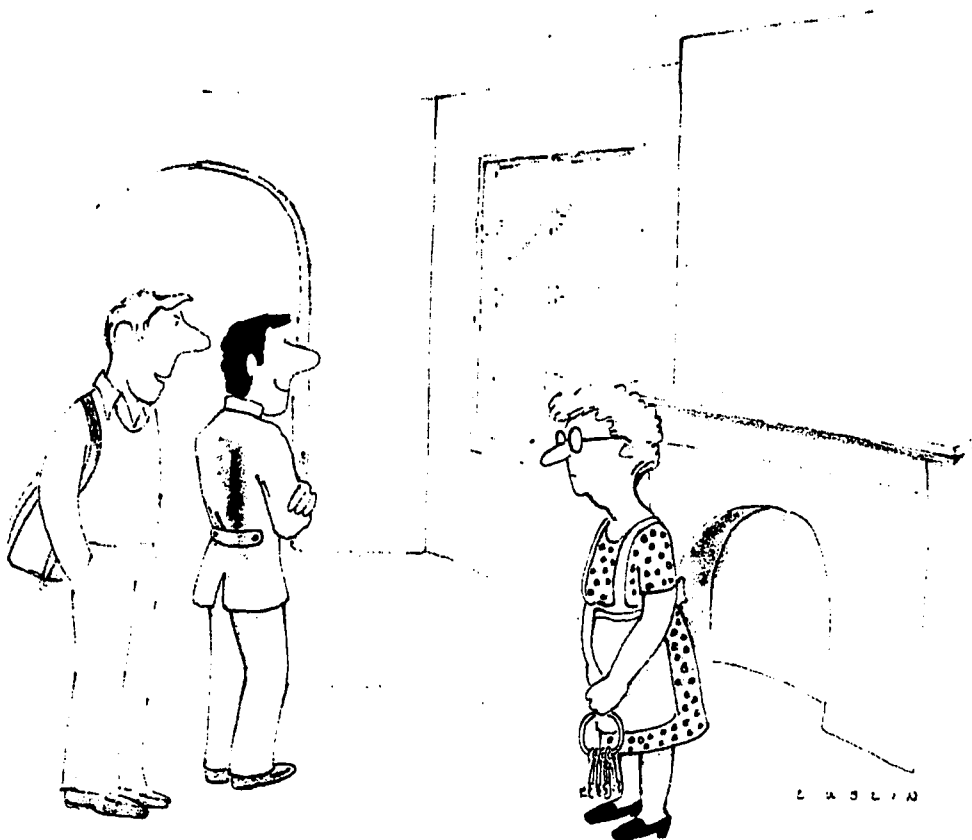
An acquaintance of mine told me he'd met this guy - he only knew the man's first name - who he thought was just my type. He arranged a blind date for us, and when I opened the front door, I found my younger brother staring me in the face. Both of us nearly fainted. And that's how I learned my brother was gay too.

I went to Europe after college, and I kept sending my brother cards where I'd write "I'm having such a gay time." In European cafes there are wandering photographers who make these postcards, so on the front of the cards would be me, my lover and several other lesbians. Later, when I came back to New York, my brother told me he was also gay. I was absolutely shocked. The thought had never crossed my mind.

My brother and I were at a cocktail party with about six or eight other men, when he asked me if I was gay. I told him it had happened a few times, but only when I was drunk. He said, "Listen, goddamn it, there's no such thing as a part-time queer. Either you are or you aren't. Now, which is it? I told him I was, and he said, "Well, thank god you finally admitted it. So am I." And then he pointed to the other guests and told me, "And so is he, and so is he, and..."

In my formal interviews, Donovan, Mitch, Monty and probably Rita have gay brothers or sisters. And because of this, coming out to family may

¹"What might make things easier for everyone concerned is research into the phenomenon of families with more than one gay child. Until now, that fertile field for study has been totally ignored by social scientists. No longer. Dr. Richard Pillard, director of the Family Studies Laboratory of Boston University, recently began an investigation into the subject. Although the results are far from complete, Pillard believes homosexuality does tend to run in families. 'But our study will only show if there is a familial component,' Pillard notes. 'Determining if the family influence is environmental, genetic or a combination of the two will require further research.'" (Giteck, 1980, p. 36)



"I know it must strike you a little odd that two single men in Gucci shoes want to rent your one-bedroom apartment, Mrs. Dellwood, but times are hard."

be easier, especially if another sibling has come out to parents earlier (as in the cases of Mitch and Donovan.) After coming out to his mother, for example, Mitch got in touch with his gay brother (who had come out to the folks much earlier) to discuss the situation. This led his brother, who lived in the Bay Area, to give Mitch emotional support as well as showing him the many facets of the gay world - such as the gay shops, bars, restaurants, newspapers - in the Bay Area. Thus, besides the usual things siblings share, gay siblings have another whole dimension to share with each other thus strengthening sibling bonding.

Kus: Does your sister know you're gay?

Donovan: Yeah, because my older brother told her. She knows that Marty is my lover. As a matter of fact, whenever I see my sister and brother, they talk about different gay activities that are going on in the city. My sister used to go to gay bars where she went to school, and also she really likes gay men because they didn't sexually impose themselves on her, which at that point in her life, was very important to her.

Kus: How did you tell your brother?

Don.: He came out a few years before I did, and he told me straight out that he was gay. I was shocked. And it wasn't until years later I finally just came out and told him that I was gay too. So, it really worked out well. We went to the bars together, hit all the new spots, went to gay activities together, and met his friends.

Kus: What does "gay activities" mean?

Don.: Well, like they have a thing in Chicago called the Ball and Hair, and we would go there dancing together, and we've gone to drag shows together and to gay parties together.

SUMMARY.

In this chapter, issues surrounding gay disclosure to the family, and especially to the parents, were explored. Issues included were: coming out as an ideal goal, deciding not to come out, living with unspoken assumptions on the part of the gay and family, some coming out

approaches, planning the event, timing or "why tell now?", some parental verbal reactions, interactional changes indicating family members' coming out process, and a note about siblings.

CHAPTER EIGHT - A FEW RESEARCH AREAS FOR THE FUTURE

Gays, like other groups explored and sometimes exploited by social scientists, are sometimes understandably reluctant to open up their lives to any form of investigation. Here, the prophetic call of the gay community demands the sacrifice of some personal privacy for the good of all. The more that is learned about the varieties of homosexual experience and the health of gay men and women, the sooner will suppressive myths be destroyed and the policies which flow from them reversed.

(Woods, 1978, p. 146)

INTRODUCTION.

Gay studies is the application of scholarly research procedures to the study of gays and gay concerns. In sociology, as in other academic disciplines, this field is quite new. And, as a result, there are very few solid scholarly writings at hand in our knowledge bank. The gay studies sociologist, then, has a virtually unlimited and uncharted sea to explore. Thus, almost anything of concern to or about gays can be said to be grist for the research mill; the list of further research possibilities would, therefore, seem almost endless.

To pare down such a list, I draw on the research findings gleaned in "Gay Freedom" and raise just a few general areas of gay studies which I believe are both fertile and worthy areas for future exploration by the gay studies sociologist. The general areas I suggest are: gay childhood, language, male-female differences, economics, health concerns, parents and siblings of gays, rural gay issues, the the feeling of being "different."

A. Gay childhood.

Earlier, I pointed out that behavioral scientists generally agree that one's sexual orientation, straight or gay, is determined in the first years of life. Unfortunately, the gay child as an object of research has been ignored. This, of course, is quite understandable; no one knows which children are gay.

Nevertheless, gay childhood can be explored by asking gay adults to reflect upon and recount their childhood experiences to uncover some common patterns. Another procedure, which is certainly more costly and time consuming, would be a longitudinal study in which cohorts of children were followed through life. From this data, we could get a better idea of how various areas of life contribute to the gay's idea of feeling "different" long before s-he knows s-he has a gay identity. Further, one could test to see whether The Best Little Boy in the World syndrome and the Rubyfruit Jungle syndrome are accurate patterns seen in gay men and lesbians respectively.

Such knowledge would, I believe, be of benefit to all persons interested in the growth and development of the child. Such research could, for example, lead to parents and teachers being able to better understand the needs of the gay child and help him/her avert special gay problems such as guilt and decreased self-confidence when the time of identification occurs.

But, this is seeing the application of such research optimistically. Knowledge about which children are gay and which aren't could also lead to discrimination against the gay child. This is a constant issue with

the gay studies researcher must deal: What use or abuse could my research be put to by others?

B. Language.

Language is the

...communication of thoughts and feelings by means of vocal sounds, and combinations of such sounds, to which meaning is attributed; human speech (Webster, 1960, p. 821).

Further, and perhaps more pertinent to this discussion, language is "...the particular form or manner of selecting and combining words characteristic of a person, group, etc..." (p. 821).

Through the study of "gay talk," then, several ideas of how gays view themselves, the world around them, and their interactions with that world can be uncovered. In the process of doing "Gay Freedom," I came across three areas in which language study could be used.

First, throughout this study, we saw how adjectives used to describe non-acceptance of being gay were usually negative: "closeted," "uptight," "furtive," while adjectives describing self-acceptance were usually positive: "okay," "free," "relaxed." This indicates the qualitative nature of the coming out process as seen by gays.

Second, some gay men refer to themselves as "faggots" or "fairies" while some lesbians refer to themselves as "dykes." This is done, according to them, to disarm homophobes. The theory is that if one uses such words first, they become ineffective weapons in the hands of the homophobes. But many gays vehemently object to such word usage to describe themselves or others. Why the difference of opinion? Are the "faggots" and "dykes" in the same stage of acceptance as the "gays" and

"lesbians"?

Third, language can often indicate profound social changes taking place in the gay world. The most interesting example of this is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the early 1970's, one often found the phrase "gay men and women" in titles of books, in articles, or in speech. In the later part of the '70's, though, the phrase more commonly seen was "gay men and lesbians." In 1980, however, it seems that the phrase "gays and lesbians" is most popular. Does this indicate a radical split between men and women in the gay/lesbian world? Is there, in actuality as well as in reality, a separate "gay community" co-existing with a separate "lesbian community"?

This third example leads to the next area for further research, male-female differences.

C. Male-Female differences.

From examination of behavioral science literature, especially that found in sociology and psychology, it would seem that homosexuality is often seen by the scientist as a stronger bond than that of gender. As a result of this belief, studies lumping gays and lesbians together often fail to illustrate gender differences and resultant concerns. In actuality, this approach is both correct and incorrect.

It is correct in that some areas of concern to gays and lesbians are shared. The coming out process, for example, is a shared phenomenon. Likewise, many health concerns are shared. The proof of the pudding is seen in this study.

On the other hand, however, this approach can lead to erroneously

attributing some concerns and characteristics of gay men to lesbians and vice versa. A good example of this was seen in one of my readings. A mother had learned her daughter was lesbian and did some talking with others about what "homosexuals" were like. Armed with her new knowledge, she went to visit her daughter and daughter's lover in their new house. Her first reaction was, "I thought gays were supposed to be such good interior decorators and creative types!" (Her confusing the male stereotype with the lesbian is seen here.)

In interacting in the gay/lesbian world, I've found that basically the only issue around which men and women rally with great predictability is that of civil rights for homosexually-oriented persons. Get a group trying to repeal gay rights laws, and the gays and lesbians work closely together. But, gays and lesbians often form separate voluntary associations, and we see the ever increasing exodus of lesbians from gay groups and projects. Because of this trend, research illustrating the separate and unique concerns of gays and lesbians could be undertaken to provide a clearer view of male vs. female gay experience.

In the area of coming out, based on the findings of "Gay Freedom," one sees that there are many differences between men and women. Such differences include coupling vs. non-coupling trends based on gender, age at identifying self as gay or lesbian, dissimilar stigma dimensions, etc.

In sum, male-female differences can be a productive area of research in gay/lesbian studies.

D. Economics.

Folk theory is a system of beliefs which are taken for granted in the everyday life of a people. "Everybody knows that..." is a typical introductory phrase to such beliefs.

Should one spend any time at all in the gay and lesbian communities, s-he will quickly read and hear about the need to form coalitions with other communities for political clout. And, as night follows day, one will undoubtedly read or hear about how gays/lesbians must both identify with and work with "the poor."

This leads to many unanswered questions about the gay and lesbian communities. Does this mean that gays and lesbians see themselves as primarily poor? Or is this concern for the poor an example of simply identifying with another minority with the idea that there's strength in numbers? Or is it a reflection of the kind of sensitivity discussed earlier in this work? What is the actuality of the gay and lesbian communities' financial status? Is the folk theory which says gay men are richer than lesbians true? Can we justifiably assume, without scientific research, that differences in male and female incomes seen in society-at-large can be said to be the same for gays and lesbians? Is it true that gays control 19% of the disposable income in America as we saw in an advertisement quote earlier in "Gay Freedom"? Are gays more like the Japanese-American or Jewish-American communities than the black community in terms of economic advancement and productivity? The list goes on and on, but the core issue I raise is this. Would research support current economic folk theory held by many in

the gay/lesbian community?

E. Health concerns.

I believe that this study has demonstrated that the coming out process can and does produce and alleviate many health problems. We saw, for example, the mental health benefits which arise from getting through the coming out process. These included such things as increased self-esteem, decreased guilt, relaxation. We also saw many health problems which can arise such as alcohol abuse, depression, suicidal ideation.

In linking health to the coming out process, and in showing that the gay/lesbian community has distinctive incidences of certain illnesses, I believe two crucial things will be accomplished.

First, by illustrating the incidences of certain diseases and undesirable mental/emotional states found so prevalently in the gay/lesbian world, research could be undertaken to shed new light on such conditions. Alcoholism, for example, that devastating killer disease which relentlessly stalks and strikes with wild abandon in the lesbian and gay communities, could be researched from a gay studies angle to provide new hope and a longer life to those afflicted.

Second, by illustrating the clusters of mental and physical health problems seen in the gay and lesbian communities, health professionals can be better able to research, treat, and prevent undesirable health states. They would also be more attuned to looking for certain health problems should their client's sexual orientation be known.

F. Parents and siblings of gays.

As pointed out earlier, "Gay Freedom" focused almost exclusively on the accounts of gay men and women. While this approach is certainly worthwhile and justified, there is a great lack of research on the parents and siblings of gays and their reactions to having a gay family member. How do parents and siblings deal with the idea of a gay in the family initially and through time? What are some strategies which could be used in the future to make the family's "coming out" process easier? How is the pattern of interaction between the family member and gay person altered through learning about the gay's identity? Which high gay incidence health problems are found among family members? Guilt? Depression? Alcohol abuse? In short, what is the family member's story?

G. Rural gay concerns.

As pointed out in the heart of this work, most scholarly work on gays and gay concerns has taken place in urban areas, especially in cities having a large visible gay population. Gay studies scholars have sorely neglected the millions of rural gay Americans.

As a result of having taught gay studies in Montana and, as a result of this, finding myself in a counseling role for untold numbers of gay cowboys and other rural gay persons, I have a keen appreciation of the great need for rural gay studies research. What's it like growing up gay in rural America? What's it like living as a gay adult in rural America? What alternative resources do rural gays have to the abundant urban gay community centers, counseling center, health

clinics, newspapers, theaters, bars and churches? Is the coming out process more difficult to achieve living in rural areas? How about depression, loneliness, alcoholism and other health problems? Are they more frequent among rural gays or less frequent? What factors go into the decision making process in which gays decide to stay in rural America? How does the rural gay spend his/her leisure time or choose friendship networks? Are gay men and lesbians closer to each other in rural settings than in urban areas?

H. The feeling of being "different."

By far the most difficult, yet most fascinating, part of this research study was, for me, looking at the idea that gays may be "different" from straights aside from being merely different in sexual orientation. This idea has a growing number of followers in the gay men's community as determined by the literature and by hearing gays speak to the issue. I am not sure if this issue is currently a "hot topic" in the lesbian community. Does "Gay Freedom" shed any light on the subject or give any clues?

The answer, I believe, is a tentative "yes." On the one hand, we know that all persons, gay or straight, have certain basic needs and dreams and worries. Each person must concern him/herself with how to make a living, what to eat, how to budget money, how to plan leisure time, who will be friends, what types of religious and political beliefs to hold, etc.

On the other hand, however, we see many items in this study which, taken together, may indicate that gays are basically different in ways

other than in sexual orientation. For example, we saw how many gays described feeling "different" long before their identification stage occurred. We saw Tony's grandmother telling him she always knew he was "special." We see Rev. Troy in Appendix I tell of his increasing wondering if there actually is such a thing as a special "gay sensitivity" while he all along has preached that gays are no different from straights. Next, we run across the belief of a special gay "sensitivity" and a special gay (male) "creativity." Fifth, we see that perhaps there's some special childhood patterns of development for the gay and lesbian children. This list could be continued to the point of being unmanageable.

So, how would the researcher tackle this? In addition to the gay childhood research already mentioned in Section A, I think the sociologist might focus on the special introspective process which occurs in the gay person as part of the coming out process. Not only is this a radical identity and self-esteem change, but often it also a time for radical changes occurring in values, beliefs and actions. It is important to remember that this deep introspective process occurs very often during adolescence and early adulthood, years crucial in one's development.

Folk theory abounds. "We're basically very different from non-gays!" "No, we're not! We're just like everybody else except for sexual orientation!" Only by subjecting these theories to scientific scrutiny will the answer be fully known.

SUMMARY.

In this chapter, we looked at a small number of areas of gay studies which are fertile fields of investigation for the gay studies sociologist. These areas included gay childhood, language, male-female differences, economics, health concerns, parents and siblings of gays, rural gay concerns, and the feeling of being "different." In each area I provided the reader with one or more possible questions to use as a springboard for future exploration in gay studies.

CHAPTER NINE - SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

*Though the cities start to crumble,
and the towers fall around us,
The sun is slowly fading,
and it's colder than the sea.
It is written from the desert
to the mountains they shall lead us
by the hand and by the heart
they will comfort you and me.
In their innocence and trusting, they will teach us to be free.
For the children and the flowers are my Sisters and my Brothers.
Their laughter and their loveliness
could clear a cloudy day
And the song that I am singing
is a prayer for nonbelievers.
Come and stand beside us; we can find a better way.
(from John Denver's "Rhymes & Reasons")*

Through the use of ethnographic research procedures in combination with literature, it was demonstrated that the coming out process is a most dynamic and powerful happening in a gay person's life. Through this analysis, several conclusions can be made.

First, it was demonstrated that coming out is not a random nor unsystematic process, but rather is a process of stages identifiable to an outside observer.

Second, it was seen that coming out has both profound societal and individual consequences. And while this study focused almost exclusively on the individual's stages of coming out, we did briefly see in Chapter Three some of the societal implications and effects of this process such as gay studies literature, civil rights, research efforts.

Third, it was shown that the coming out process can vary from individual to individual in terms of length. Terry, for example, went from

Stage I to Stage IV in a couple of weeks, while it took Rev. Eric more than a quarter of a century.

Fourth, we saw that the first stage of coming out is recognizing one is gay. This identification stage is a profound, radical change in what symbolic interactionists refer to as "identity," that which answers the question "Who am I?" This, in turn, often leads to a radical change in self-esteem or "What am I worth?"

This stage is frequently preceded by exploring other-sex and same-sex sexual activity, and it is often characterized by not wanting to be gay, guilt and shame, and special problems resulting from guilt, or low self-esteem, such as depression, alcohol abuse, or suicidal ideation. The unique "sexual orientation disturbance" phenomenon is seen in a small minority of gays in this stage.

Fifth, we saw that in order to have a positive self-esteem, the gay person must change his or her preconceived notions of what gays are like; this is called cognitive change. This stage is characterized by passing as straight, which I call "closet passing," reading gay literature, exploring gay reality through talking with other gays, deep introspection, and finally beginning to disclose identity to a select few.

Sixth, once the gay person has rid self of negative ideas of what gays are like, s-he can accept self as a gay person in a positive light. The gay has achieved acceptance (Stage III) or what I call "gay freedom."

In this third stage, the guilt seen in the first two stages begins to disappear, and one is then able to experience a gay reality characterized by honesty and candidness, energy release, increased self-confidence, in sum, increased mental health. The reported "seeing society clearer" leads

to many unanswered questions for further research which are listed in Chapter Six.

Seventh, after achieving acceptance, the gay moves to the final stage of the coming out process, action. Types of action include disclosure, religious changes, sharing secrets, developing social consciousness, and others.

Next, we look at one type of action in great detail, disclosing "I am gay" to one's family in Chapter Seven.

And finally, in Chapter Eight, I offer the reader some fertile and worthy areas for future research.

With this summary, our journey towards understanding this important life process is ended. But, in another sense, it is only a beginning. For now, armed with new knowledge, we can better appreciate what is meant by a "gay reality." We can see gay men and women in a new light. We better understand what is true and not true about gays. And, based on this new knowledge, we must each decide what we individually will do with this knowledge. Will we change attitudes? Change behavior? Conduct research? As I said, this ending is just a beginning.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Informants' Brief Biographical Sketches¹

Trent is a 28 year old black male² who came to Seattle with the main purpose of "coming out" away from his family and friends. Trent was born in a military town in Georgia and grew up on several bases in Europe and on the East Coast as an "army brat." Because of the lack of black men his own age in growing up, Trent has pretty much considered himself a "white, middle-class type with black skin." He received a B.A. in psychology from a state university in Georgia before landing a job as a director of an alcohol treatment program in the federal government. When I first met Trent, he was doing counseling with severely disturbed mental patients in a Seattle clinic in order to take a break from the alcoholism work he had been doing previously. Presently, Trent is working for a corporation as a blue-collar worker, saving his money, and has plans to attend school next fall to work on a degree in social work. Although his parents were Baptist³ and raised him as such, Trent is now unaffiliated with any religion at present.

Ethan, a 32 year old man, was born in a small town in Illinois and

¹Most of the interviews were conducted in Seattle between 1978 and 1979. Six of the interviews, done in the dissertation proposal stage, were done in 1975 in Missoula; these interviews are those of Bob, Monty, Mitch, Fabian, Terry, and Helena.

²All of the informants, with the exception of Trent, are Caucasian.

³Religious affiliations were asked of the informants in this study as it was hypothesized that coming out may change religious belief systems, especially for those gays who found themselves in very traditional, fundamentalist churches.

raised in a rural Illinois community. Both of his parents are Lutheran, but since becoming an adult, Ethan has joined the Episcopal church. After receiving his bachelor's degree in economics from a church-related college in Minnesota, Ethan came to Seattle and earned his M.S.W. from the University of Washington in 1974. Ethan has been in private practice as a social worker in Seattle working mainly with the gay community, but he also does couples workshops and other seminars at one of the local private universities in the city. He's active in the gay community and has served as a board member of one of the largest gay groups in town. Currently he is founding a social work group practice specializing in gays.

Skip, a 31 year old paramedic in the U.S. Navy, was born and raised in a medium-sized city in Indiana. Following high school, Skip joined the Navy and is planning on making it his career. He came to Seattle in 1977 with his job and currently lives off base with a couple of other gay men...Trent and Lance. Although raised as a Methodist by both parents, Skip simply defines himself now as a "Christian."

Xavier is a 33 year old hair stylist who was born and raised in large cities in Washington State. Born and raised a Catholic, Xavier still identifies himself as Catholic although he doesn't frequent Mass and the sacraments very much. Following high school, Xavier attended cosmetology school and is now in a thriving business for himself in Seattle doing both women's and men's hair. Xavier lives with his lover Cimarron in a suburb of Seattle, is a frequenter of the gay bars and taverns, and is active in the community's summer campgrounds.

Cimarron is a 31 year old man born and raised in a small town in

Idaho. Having grown up in a Reorganized Latter-Day Saints (R-Mormon) family, Cimarron had many difficulties with blending his homosexuality with religion. At one point, suicide was his near-solution to the conflict. Today, however, Cimarron has rejected his formal religion and is currently in no religious belief system. After receiving his B.A. in secondary education from a major state university in Idaho, he came to Seattle with his lover Xavier. Because of his job as a field representative to a national boys' association, being "in the closet" is a prerequisite on the job. Off the job, Cimarron has an active social life with gay friends, enjoys the taverns and social clubs, and with his lover enjoys the gay campgrounds in the mountains.

Marty, a 23 year old man, is a vocational director with one of the gay helping institutions in Seattle. He was born and raised in a large city in West Virginia before attending a large state university in Illinois. Following his graduation with a B.A. in physiology, Marty came to Seattle in 1977 with his lover Donovan whom he met at the university. Because of his job, Marty is involved in the many agencies and major social affairs of the Seattle gay community. Born a Methodist, Marty was a Presbyterian in youth; today he considers self agnostic.

Donovan is a 26 year old man who was born and raised in a university town in Illinois and took some additional courses in banking. He came to Seattle in 1977 with his lover Marty and is currently a bank teller. Of all the informants for this study, Donovan is the only one who reported a severe acute psychotic episode (A.P.E.) centering around his coming out process. With the actual "telling" of being gay, the

psychotic symptoms (delusions and hallucinations) disappeared. Born and raised a Roman Catholic, Donovan today is in the process of "shopping around" for a religion.

Lance, a 25 year old man, was born and raised in a small town in Pennsylvania and raised in a rural setting in Idaho. He received a bachelor's degree in business administration from a state university in Idaho, a B.A. in art from a small Washington state university, and he did graduate studies at the same university. He came to Seattle a year ago and lives with Trent and Skip. Lance, born and raised a Roman Catholic, still identifies himself as such. Presently he's employed by the state government to determine eligibility for unemployment compensation.

Rev. Troy - not Troy Perry - is a 54 year old man and leader in the Seattle gay community. He was born and raised in a medium sized city in California and studied for the Evangelical Covenant ministry in Chicago where he got his B.A. in psychology. Later he took graduate courses at a large university in California and some at a small private university in Seattle. In his coming out process, Troy had difficulty integrating his gayness with his religion. So, after successfully serving his church in many various ministries in several states, he joined the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Seattle and rapidly advanced to be a minister and pastor of that pro-gay Protestant denomination. Troy is active on many boards of gay agencies in Seattle, is known as a "peacemaker" among various political factions in the gay community, and has done extensive counseling with gays and their families. His story is told in full in a later appendix beginning on p. 392.

Casey, a 66 year old retired railroad engineer, was born and raised in small Texas towns. His father was a Methodist minister in the small town where Casey grew up, and his mother was a Presbyterian school teacher in the town. After receiving his B.A. from a university in San Antonio, Casey taught in Texas schools where he met a former teacher of his who "brought him out." As Casey puts it:

You can't imagine what gay life was like in West Texas in the Year of our Lord 1937. It's a whole historical document, from Fort Worth to El Paso, that some 600-odd miles. I think every gay person in that area along Highway 80 and the Texas and City Railroad knew each other.

Later, Casey did graduate work at a prestigious North Carolina university and a state university in Colorado. Spurred on to a life of travel, Casey worked for a railroad until retirement. Currently he's a leader in a group of elderly gays who meet to discuss what it means to be older and gay and to develop social activities for the group. He recently received an award for his humanitarianism from his MCC parish for his many works helping others. His interview is on p. 404.

Vincent is a 34 year old public relations person who was born and raised in small Minnesota towns. He received his B.A. in music from a Washington state university and came to Seattle in 1955. In the past couple of years, Vincent has been active in the gay community in fund-raising and newspaper work for one of the gay agencies in town. Born and raised a Methodist, Vincent considers himself an atheist with very traditional views of love, relationships, fidelity, and the like.

Tim, a 47 year old man, is a gay bar owner and lives with his lover Cliff in downtown Seattle. Because he came from a military family, Tim has lived all over the country although he was born in California. After

completing some college in Texas, he came to Seattle in 1969. Due to his position as a gay bar owner, Tim is frequently called upon to lend a hand in staging fund-raisers for the gay community and helping with social, cultural and sports activities in the community. Tim was raised by his Mormon father as his mother died when he was very young. Tim today is Roman Catholic.

Cliff, a 52 year old auditor, lives with his lover Tim. Born and raised in Seattle, Cliff owes his job as an auditor to a high school education plus hard work plus on the job training. Cliff often finds himself involved in social affairs of the gay community due to his life with Tim. A Presbyterian by birth and in youth, he has no religious affiliation today.

Mark is a 39 year old man born and raised in a medium sized city in southern New Jersey. Following 16 years of schooling, including some college in military school, Mark came to Seattle in 1974 and worked as an insurance executive for an international insurance firm. Fired up by the gay liberation movement, Mark founded a group for gays which was destined to become the largest political, educational and social gay association in the country. After serving on many local, state and national boards involved in the gay and women's movements - including presenting gay concerns to a special panel in the White House, Mark took a post as a national gay leader in the East. In youth, Mark was a Catholic as was his mother; his father was Anglican. Today Mark claims no religious affiliation but does interact with many religious leaders on gay issues facing the churches.

Mike, a 41 year old man, was born and raised in a medium sized city in Washington state. He received a bachelor's degree in education from one of Washington's state universities and did some elementary school teaching. Bored with teaching, he then did various jobs including being a postal service employee, a hospital orderly, and an owner of a non-gay bar in Seattle's International District. Currently he's unemployed. Today he has no religious affiliation although born and raised a Presbyterian.

Lonny is a 30 year old man who's a journeyman cutter in upholstery and garments. In business for himself, Lonny donates much of his time and talents helping in social affairs in the gay community. He supplements his income with odd jobs in gay-owned business ventures. Having been married twice, with 2 children by the first marriage, Lonny says this experiment into straight marriage didn't "change" him into a straight as he had planned. "It don't work!" Lonny was born an Episcopalian and finds this church very important in his life.

Jon is a 43 year old man who was born and raised in a small town in New Jersey. After completing a bachelor of science degree in forestry from an Ivy-league university in Pennsylvania, Jon came to Seattle in 1962 and is a forester here. He lives in a mobile home in the forest with his lover Tony. The two trailers on either side of Jon's are owned and occupied by gay men couples also. Jon is active in using his forestry knowledge and skills in bettering the Seattle gay community's camp by Index, Washington. Born and reared as a Methodist, he classifies himself as a "general Protestant."

Tony is a 23 year old man who lives with his lover Jon. He was born and raised in a small town in Maryland before coming to Seattle in 1972. Currently Tony is going to a community college studying mechanics, but he also has 2 years of college under his belt with his major being environmental horticultural management. He grew up a Roman Catholic and was active in the church until a traditionalist priest humiliated him publicly because of his gay identity. Tony's mother is Catholic and father is a Southern Baptist. Despite having "no religion," both he and Jon never fail to say grace before meals in their home. Tony, like Jon, is active in helping with the gay camp.

Rev. Eric is a 52 year old native of northern Idaho where he spent his childhood. After working for a major Hollywood studio in motion pictures and becoming a certified gemologist, Eric went to a famous Midwest Episcopal seminary to study for the ministry. Because he refused to be "in the closet" about his gay identity, the Protestant denomination refused him ordination to the diaconate. He left the seminary with an M.A. equivalent in theology, came to Seattle in 1953, and he worked as a gemologist until he was ordained a minister in the MCC in New Orleans. He's been active in the gay community as a counselor and as an advocate for gay prisoners and their families. Eric worked on a project which helped youth hustlers and prostitutes as a counselor until the program funds were terminated.

Paris, a 25 year old man, was born and raised in a middle sized city in Kansas before coming to Seattle with his family at the age of 14. He attended a prestigious Washington university where he earned his B.A. in psychology. While working as a mental health worker, in a

hospital setting, Paris studied interior design and men's fashions on the side. Today he's an assistant manager in a Washington college town for one of the largest retail stores in America. He hopes eventually to be a men's clothing buyer. From age 13, when he abandoned his parents' Methodist faith as it "...didn't provide me with any answers to my questions," he has considered himself an agnostic. While denying his gay identity, Paris was in a straight marriage, but since has divorced.

Dr. Luke is a 44 year old psychiatrist specializing in mental health of gay clients and promoting wellness rather than focusing on illness. He was born and raised in rural Tennessee and lived there until the age of six. From six through high school, Luke lived in a large city in Tennessee. He received his B.S. degree in physical sciences and his M.D. from Tennessee state universities. He came to Seattle in 1963 and currently has a group practice composed of gay therapists from many of the helping disciplines including nursing, social work and psychology. A Southern Baptist from childhood, Luke became a Protestant Episcopalian which he finds very helpful in his life. He's quite active in the gay community and enjoys a position of esteem in the community.

Bob, 25 years old, was born and raised in a small copper-mining town in Montana. Having discovered his gay identity while a student at a Montana university, Bob led a "double life" throughout his college career. After receiving his bachelor's degree in psychology/sociology, Bob worked as a social worker for the State of Montana before coming to Seattle to work in the criminal justice system. Raised in the fundamentalist Assembly of God church, Bob abandoned religion as it was totally foreign to his gay identity.

Monty, a 21 year old Montanan and former lover of Bob's, was a sophomore at a leading Montana university majoring in theater at the time of this interview. After coming out in Montana, Monty was a frequent guest on all-gay panels for classes in high schools and the university where he was a student. He left the university for Seattle where he became more familiar with gay life. The last I heard from Monty, he was employed as a waiter in a gay Seattle restaurant and trying to "get my act together before finishing college." Not having had parents who had any religion, Monty has never had to deal with the religion issue in his coming out process.

Mitch was a 20 year old sophomore at a Montana state university when I first interviewed him. Born and raised in a Montana university town, he attended that school majoring in sociology. After he came out as gay during his sophomore year, he took off to become a summer quarter intern with the National Gay Task Force in New York City. At this time, his decision to work in the gay movement full-time was crystallized. He completed his bachelor's degree in community services from a major Oregon university before giving himself full-time to the gay movement in Oregon and California. Although raised a Catholic, Mitch has no religious preference today. His older brother, also gay, is an activist journalist in the Bay Area of California.

Fabian, a 20 year old sophomore at a Montana state university when interviewed, is a native Montanan who spent some time growing up in Hawaii as well as Montana. Of all those interviewed, Fabian is the most closeted. Majoring in business and accounting on the undergraduate level, Fabian is now in law school. He follows the Roman Catholic faith

of his parents and was highly active in his undergraduate fraternity chapter. To Fabian, the worst possible fate which could befall him would be to lose friends as a result of coming out.

Terry was a 20 year old Montana man when first interviewed. Unlike most other informants in this study, Terry's coming out process was very rapid, going from a stage of identification to publicly talking on gay issues in high schools and university classes. By occupation, Terry is a "jack-of-all-trades." His work experience includes fire fighting in Montana forests, being a waiter in a gay bar/restaurant in Seattle, guarding Montana ghost towns from vandals in the summer months, and selling shoes for a national chain. Although he grew up as a Protestant, Terry defines himself as an agnostic now.

Carol is a 35 year old nurse counselor specializing in gay and lesbian problems and therapies. A native of a middle sized town in Maryland, Carol completed her nursing education in Maryland, practiced psychosocial nursing in Chicago, and is in private practice in Seattle today. Out for many years before the gay liberation movement, Carol has spoken to over 500 groups on gay/lesbian issues, been fired from a nursing position because of her lesbian identity, and has been involved with many gay/lesbian organizations. Carol had a unique experience one day while practicing nursing in Chicago. While giving a lecture to the psychiatric staff about the damage done to gay folks through homophobic rhetoric, a young gay patient, who was being harrassed by other patients on the psychiatric unit, hanged himself in the other room. Carol has entertained musically with her lover Evelyn throughout the United States and has made a gay country music album with other Seattle gays. Raised in the Church

of God, Carol has no religion at present.

Evelyn is a 29 year old clinical audiologist from a middle sized town in Wisconsin. She came to Seattle in 1967 and earned a bachelor's degree in speech and hearing and a master's in speech pathology and audiology from a Washington state university. She is currently practicing audiology at a Northwest regional hearing center. Evelyn lives with her lover Carol and enjoys life to the fullest. Her faith background is Jewish, but she defines herself as a "non-practicing Jew."

Rita is a 28 year old psychology student in her junior year at a Washington state university. Born and raised in a small Ohio town, Rita came to Seattle in 1977 to do her college work. She lives with her lover, a business executive, in the forests outside Seattle. A most articulate person, Rita is currently searching for a belief system compatible with her lesbian identity and is searching through religions founded by women. Raised as a Lutheran, she defines herself today as an agnostic.

Sr. Theresa is a 39 year old Roman Catholic lesbian nun. Born in a large California port city, Theresa grew up all over the United States as a child of a Navy family. She received her B.A. in library science from a private Catholic college in Texas and her M.A. in religious education from a Jesuit university in the Pacific Northwest. After spending several years in a traditional religious community teaching, Theresa joined a more progressive community of nuns who live on their own, find their own housing, and make their own living any way they can. Having spent some years as a religious education coordinator in parishes in

the Northwest, Sr. Theresa is now a counselor working with severely disturbed persons. She is considering entering the nursing profession while remaining a nun.

Helena was a 21 year old freshman majoring in general studies at a Montana university when first interviewed for the dissertation proposal. Born and raised in a small Missouri town, she came to Montana to do her college work. Since this interview, Helena has dropped out of her college studies and lives in a lesbian agricultural commune in Montana. She considers herself a Roman Catholic.

Appendix B - Pre-Interview Demographic Form

Date _____ Time _____ Place _____

Name _____

Age _____

Occupation _____

Education _____

Hometown born _____

Hometown raised _____

Came to Seattle (or Missoula) in (year) _____

Religion of Parents _____

Religion at age 13 _____

Present religion _____



University of Montana
Missoula, Montana 59801
(406) 243-0211

I, _____, do hereby give my
full consent to be interviewed on tape for the doctoral dissertation
research of Bob Kus, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology,
University of Montana. I understand that any information, with the
exception of my name and names of non-public figures, may be used
in publication in the future. Such publication may be in the form
of microfilm, books, scholarly or popular journal articles, or
other forms deemed appropriate by Bob Kus.

Signature of Informant

Robert J. Kus

Witness

Date

1. How long do you think you've been gay?
2. What makes you think you're gay?
3. When did you first label yourself as gay or homosexual?
4. Did you ever feel guilty about being gay in the beginning? Do you still feel guilty? (If not,) how did you get over this? How long did it take?
5. Did you ever cry about being gay? Ever feel suicidal or depressed?
6. Did you ever wish you weren't gay? Did you ever try to change into straight?
7. After you identified yourself as gay, was there a time lag before you accepted being gay as a good thing?
8. Before coming out, did you ever try to pass as straight? For example, did you ever date the opposite sex to fool anyone into thinking you were straight? Give me some examples of people you know or have known wh've done that.
9. How would you define coming out? Do you think it's a process? Explain.
10. How did you come out?
11. Why did you come out?
12. Did you lose any friends because you came out?
13. What were your ideas of coming out before you did it? Was it easier coming out than you had imagined or harder? Give some examples.
14. Would you advise others to come out? Why? Why not? Under what circumstances would you advise persons to stay in the closet? Give me some examples of people you'd advise to stay in the closet.
15. Do you see any benefits of coming out in your life? Elaborate on benefits of coming out as you see them.
16. Do you see any drawbacks in coming out in your life? Elaborate.
17. Some people see coming out as a process which has certain stages or phases. Do you agree with that? Explain.
18. How do you think coming out could be made easier for others?
19. Have you come out to your family? Why or why not?
20. Did you plan the coming out event with your family? What kinds of plans did you come up with to set the stage for telling your family?
21. What kind of reception did you get or think you'll get telling your family?
22. Are you a member of the gay community? How did you get membership?
23. Can a straight person be a member of the gay community? Why or why not?
24. Can a gay person passing as straight be a member of the gay community? How?
25. Are you part of the gay liberation movement? Why or why not? What does the term 'gay liberation' mean to you?

APPENDIX E - IDENTIFICATION TEST (with answers in parentheses) -380-

Directions: The following is a list of words, names or questions which I'll read to you one at a time. Please identify each if you can.

1. Dave Kopay. (Gay football star who wrote THE DAVE KOPAY STORY.)
2. Sgt. Leonard Matlovich. (Discharged sgt. from Army because of coming out as openly gay. Subject of TV documentary.)
3. THE ADVOCATE. (National gay newspaper.)
4. The Stonewall Inn. (Gay bar on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village which is credited with being the site of the beginning of the gay liberation movement in 1969.)
5. Initiative 13. (The anti-gay Seattle initiative which was defeated.)
6. The Dorian Group. (Largest gay educational, political and social association in Washington State.)
7. Rev. Troy Perry. (Founder of the pro-gay Metropolitan Community Church.)
8. Can you name at least 3 gay bars or taverns in Seattle?
(Many choices.)
9. Where would you go for VD treatment? (Several choices.)
10. Do you know any gay counseling services in Seattle? (Several choices including Seattle Counseling Services for Sexual Minorities.)
11. Harvey Milk. (Openly gay San Francisco Supervisor who was slain.)
12. S.G.N. (SEATTLE GAY NEWS.)
13. THE FRONT RUNNER. (Famous gay novel by Montanan Patricia Nell Warren.)
14. Can you name at least 3 American cities in which gay rights were repealed? (Wichita, St. Paul, Eugene, Dade County/Miami.)
15. Dignity. (Catholic gay association.)

Following this test, informants were asked how they knew the answers, i.e., what was their source of information.

APPENDIX F - SENSITIVITY RANKING TEST

Instructions: (Given verbally.) Many gay men and lesbians have talked about the notion of a certain kind of "gay sensitivity." I've also run across this notion in much of the gay literature. What I'd like you to do now is this. First, imagine 4 categories: gay men, lesbians, straight women, and straight men. Forget about "individuals" you know, and instead, simply think of these four categories of persons. Write down on a piece of paper which group you feel is "most sensitive" and continue to the "least sensitive." When you've done this, we'll discuss the results and how and why you arrived at your conclusions.

APPENDIX G - Protection of Human Subjects

**PROPOSED POLICY STATEMENT
FOR THE
USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH**

Prepared by

Ad Hoc Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

**University of Montana
Missoula, Montana**

May 25, 1976

**PROPOSED POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE
USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH**

-383-

INTRODUCTION

The protection of human subjects in research is of paramount importance, and concern to attain this objective is complicated by the need to balance conflicting principles. While research involving risk to human subjects can carry great potential for improving the condition of mankind, it is essential that human subjects be protected against harm.

The larger community interest in research for the general good must be weighed against the safety and privacy of individuals. The federal government has instituted requirements, and the University has implemented policies, which attempt to protect human subjects while allowing research to proceed with a minimum of interference. Safeguarding the rights and welfare of human subjects is, therefore, a joint ethical responsibility. In the case of government sponsored research, the University has, in addition, a clear legal responsibility.

However, any set of requirements should recognize the principle that the researcher himself is primarily and ultimately responsible for the protection of his human subjects. This stand is based both on pragmatism and principle. Within practical limits, no other system can work. No amount of policing and investigation can prevent the abuse of human subjects if the researcher does not act responsibly. When experiments are conducted, only the researcher and perhaps some assistants perform and supervise the procedure. Ultimately, the researcher is responsible for the study and the protection of the subjects within the study. Any attempt to police this responsibility would involve a system in which informed technical observers would be present at experiments. Such a system would be expensive and hostile to the researchers. It would also discourage research in controversial areas.

Because primary responsibility rests with the researcher, efforts should be directed toward raising the ethical awareness of researchers. The central role of a campus Institutional Review Board should be education rather than regulation. Academic disciplines have traditions and codes of ethics relevant to human subjects, and additional requirements should build on these.

The researcher is to be assisted in the protection of human subjects by the agency of an Institutional Review Board. The Board shall determine that the rights and welfare of the subjects involved are protected, that the risks to an individual are outweighed by the potential benefits to him or by the importance of the knowledge to be gained, and that informed consent is to be obtained by methods that are appropriate. Such a review does not replace the responsibility of the individual researcher to protect subjects.

ROLE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

-384-

The Institutional Review Board consists of University faculty and laypersons. It is the role of the Board to review and approve all research involving human subjects. The Board also helps determine its own policy and procedure for such clearance work, and develops general guidelines and principles relevant to human subject experimentation.

The Institutional Review Board will review all University research involving human subjects, excluding that performed by a student or faculty member under a private contract in which no University supported staff or facilities are involved. Specifically included is a wide range of research (if it involves human subjects) such as funded projects for which an officer of the University must sign, unfunded research involving University staff or facilities, graduate student theses and dissertations, class projects and the like.

SCOPE OF ACTIVITY

For proposals submitted to many federal agencies, Institutional Review Board action is automatically required. With the above-mentioned exception of private contract work not involving University staff or facilities, all other University research involving human subjects is to be evaluated by the Review Board. There are some activities which, while not literally research, involve some potential risks to humans. These might include activities more of the nature of classroom demonstrations than research. Specific instances might be the collection of blood or tissue specimens from class members, the administration of questionnaires to class members, and the like. Anyone using such practices should be cognizant of any risks involved and, when risk is involved, submit statements for consideration by the Board. However, approval once given may be taken to apply to subsequent classes as long as the original practices are maintained. A revised proposal is appropriate when procedures are changed. More generally, if there is doubt concerning the applicability of evaluation by the Institutional Review Board, one should at least consult with colleagues and/or the Board.

RISK

A human subject is considered to be "at risk" if he or she is exposed to the possibility of harm--physical, psychological, social, or other. The determination of the degree of risk is a matter of the application of common sense and professional judgment in relation to the circumstances of the activity in question.

PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

Researchers using human subjects who may be at risk are required to submit a proposal to the Institutional Review Board. The proposal should

Procedures To Be Followed (continued)

include a statement of the researcher's responsibilities toward the human subjects involved. The following points are all to be addressed.

1. A brief description of the research.
2. A description of the benefits, if any, of the research to the human subjects, and of the benefits to human or scientific knowledge.
3. A description of how the subjects will be used.
4. A description of the subjects, indicating explicitly whether any are minors (under age 18 per Montana law) or otherwise members of "vulnerable" populations.
5. A description of the risks and discomforts, if any, to the subjects. Such deleterious effects may be physical, psychological or social. Some research involves neither risks nor discomfort but rather violations of normal expectations. Such violations, if any, should be specified.
6. A description of the means to be taken to minimize each such deleterious effect or violation, including the means by which the subject's personal privacy is to be protected and confidentiality of information received maintained.
7. A copy of the consent form that is to be used with the subjects.
8. If a waiver of written informed consent is desired, a justification of that desire.
9. Any other information pertaining to the researcher's ethical responsibilities to his subjects.

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent is to be obtained from each subject. The basic elements of informed consent are:

1. A fair explanation of the procedures to be followed, including an identification of those which are experimental;
2. A description of the attendant discomforts and risks;
3. A description of the benefits to be expected;
4. A disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures that would be advantageous for the subject;

5. An offer to answer any inquiries concerning the procedures;
6. An instruction that the subject is free to withdraw his consent and to discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time.

Informed consent should be obtained in writing. If strong cause exists, waiver of written consent or modification of the six basic elements above may be permitted by the Board, but the reasons must be individually and specifically documented in the Board minutes and signed by the chairperson. Granting of permission to use modified consent procedures imposes additional responsibility upon the Review Board to establish that the risk to any subject is minimum, that use of either of the primary procedures for obtaining informed consent would surely invalidate objectives of considerable immediate importance, and that any reasonable alternative means for attaining these objectives would be less advantageous to the subject.

MODIFICATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.

Modification of the written consent requirement is justifiable only if the reasons for doing so are documented. Any one of the following represents justification for allowing a waiver of written informed consent:

1. The subjects are from non-literate cultures; anthropologists are generally granted a waiver of written consent when they study non-literate communities. Written informed consent has little meaning in this context. It does not provide the subject with more protection, and it does interfere with the research. Legal documents are threatening and can easily destroy the rapport needed between the researcher and the subject.
2. The subject is a voluntary participant in an adequately publicized activity. In this situation, the subject demonstrates his implicit consent by volunteering.
3. The subject comes from a class of people well able to protect themselves. This includes public officials, university administrators, etc. If a researcher were investigating efficiency in city government by interviewing public officials, he would probably not be required to obtain written informed consent from each official he interviewed. Public officials are quite accustomed to being interviewed and questioned. The rules are written to protect naive subjects from harm. The Board sees no need to invoke complicated, perhaps negative procedures, when the subjects are well able to protect themselves.

4. The research is performed using existing data held by a third party. Researchers occasionally use existing data such as union membership records or the results of a questionnaire conducted by others. In such cases it is often very difficult and sometimes impossible to obtain written consent from the individuals who were the subjects of the original data. When there is no substantial risk to the subjects, either from invasion of privacy or other cause, the Institutional Review Board will waive the requirement for written informed consent.
5. Written informed consent would make the research impossible. In addition to the items listed above, other conditions, such as the need for a random sample, sometimes make informed consent impossible. The Board will waive the requirement under these conditions if it believes no substantial risk exists.

POSSIBLE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The following are possible outcomes of Board review:

1. Clears the research as "no risk." No risk projects are those which in the professional opinion of Board members involve no danger whatsoever to the subjects. Examples of no risk procedures include the administration of anonymous opinion questionnaires, measurements which involve no risk such as reaction times or hand-eye coordinations, and interviews on non-threatening topics. Written informed consent is not required in no risk projects. Simple administrative procedures are to be used in clearing no risk projects and the full Board need not be burdened with their review.
2. Approves the research. In such cases, the research may involve some risk to subjects. But the Board finds that this risk is not unreasonable, and that the researcher has taken all practical steps to minimize these risks.
3. Conditionally approves the research. This action entitles the researcher to proceed with the project as long as he fulfills certain conditions set by the Board. Conditions include items such as revising the consent form to explain the procedure more clearly, adding a foreign language version of a consent form, receiving clearance from the student health service, etc.
4. Asks that the researcher resubmit the proposal. This occurs when the Board feels that it has insufficient information

to take action, or when it feels the research design contains dangers and should be revised to reduce risks to human subjects. The Board may ask the researcher to provide for emergency back-up medical care, to take further steps to protect the confidentiality of subjects, or to develop a substitute procedure for administering an injection.

5. Disapproves the research. The Board avoids a flat disapproval whenever possible. Instead, the Board works with the researcher, suggests revisions in the research design, and asks that the researcher re-think his experimental procedures and resubmit a proposal.

DUTIES OF THE BOARD CHAIRPERSON

The Chairperson of the Board performs the following duties:

1. Reviews all research submitted to the Board to determine the presence or absence of risk to human subjects.
2. Brings those projects involving risk to the attention of the Board and convenes and chairs Board meetings.
3. Prepares written reports of the Board's decisions.
4. Negotiates with researchers in those instances in which the Board sets conditions on the conduct of the project or requires additional information before approving the project.
5. Meets with individual researchers to explain and amplify Board decisions and policies.
6. Periodically monitors high risk or sensitive projects.

The Chairperson also performs an important role as educational liaison to the campus community. This involves explaining what the Board does, how and why it came into existence, and how it operates. It entails working on a face-to-face basis with other administrative committees and Faculty Senate committees and with chairpersons of individual departments and organized research units.

The Chairperson is also involved in the development of University responses to national policy and legislation regarding the protection of human subjects, in cooperation with the Research Advisory Council and the Office of the Director of Sponsored Program Administration. This involves definition of the University position and communication with Department of Health, Education, and Welfare officials and Congressional committees.

Duties of the Board Chairperson (continued)

-389-

Because of the heavy duties placed on the Chairperson, he is granted 50 percent released teaching time, more as increased demands dictate. Further the Board is to have a staff of not less than one full-time secretary.

DOCUMENTATION OF BOARD ACTIVITIES

Board activities must be documented. Files must include copies of all documents presented or required for initial and continuing review, and all transmittals on Board actions. Meeting minutes, including records of discussions of substantive issues and their resolutions, are to be retained by the institution at the direction of the Board.

COMPOSITION OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

The Board shall consist of seven members; six from the University of Montana and one member of the community who is not affiliated with the University. Of the six from the University, one is to be a member of the law faculty, two are to be from biomedical disciplines, two are to be from social-behavioral science disciplines, and the chairperson is to be an individual with administrative ability and with broad scholarship. In the review process the chairperson may appoint subcommittees, and invite the consultation of additional faculty, members of the community, prospective subjects of research and the like.

Members of the Institutional Review Board will be appointed to three-year staggered terms by the President from a list of nominees jointly agreed upon by the Director of Sponsored Program Administration and the Research Advisory Council. The University nominees should be individuals with experience in research involving human subjects.



University of Montana
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I, _____, do hereby agree to
serve as a non-paid member of the Gloss-Clarity Committee for the
doctoral dissertation of Bob Kus, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology,
University of Montana. In this capacity, I agree to examine written
material submitted to me by Bob Kus for glossing and clarity feedback
using my knowledge as a professional writer. Because of the likelihood
that certain informants in this study, although disguised with fictitious
names, might be recognized by me, I agree to complete confidentiality
regarding knowledge of informants. Further, I agree that my name may be
used in this study as a member of this committee.

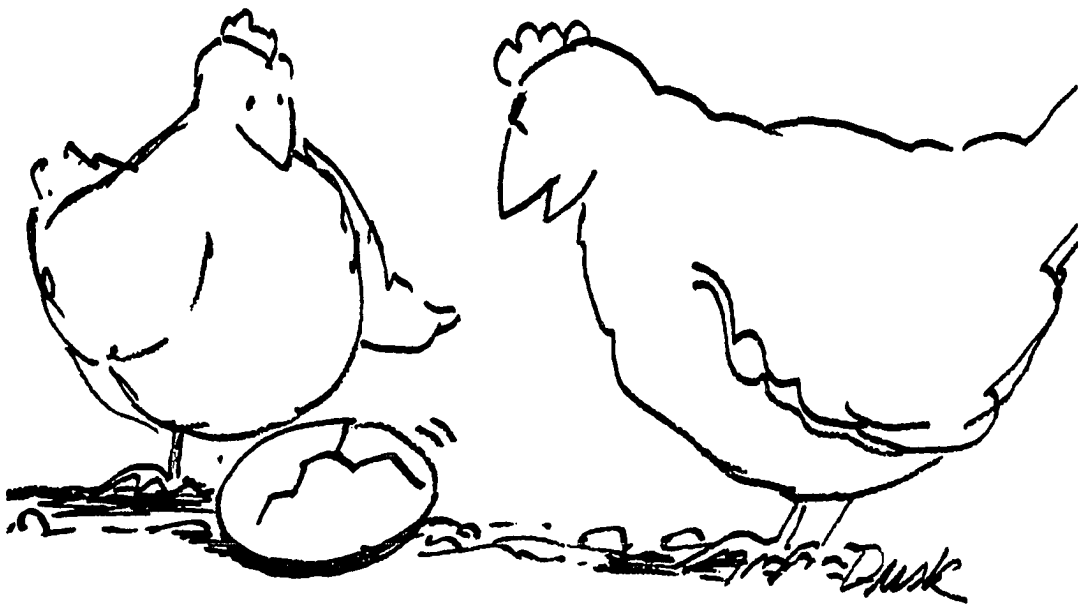
Signature of Committee Member

Robert J. Kus

Witness

Date

APPENDIX I - SAMPLE INTERVIEWS BEFORE ANALYSIS



"Oh, terrific. We're going to have to hear yet another coming-out story."

Interview #1 - Troy, age 54, minister/counselor.

This interview was chosen to be included in its entirety for many reasons. It is the story of one man's coming out process going from "having suspicions" to identification, to passing as straight, to acceptance, and finally to dramatic behavior changes, i.e., becoming a minister in a predominantly gay church. It is also the story of a man who uses his gay identity by serving other gays and their families through a religious ministry.

Kus: At what age were you when you discovered you were gay, Troy?

Troy: It's really hard to answer that, Bob, because of the fact that I just didn't wake up one day and know I was gay. In that era and time, there was not enough information. It was not talked about. It was too subverted. People were just simply not knowledgeable at all, at least I wasn't, about this whole thing called homosexuality. And so, I guess that maybe I would have to look back and say that I have a suspicion that at the age of 6 or 7 I probably began to discover that I had a casual interest at least in other guys. But that was also the era and time when guys were, you know, at that age in life not particularly interested in girls. You had a tendency to put them down, or fight with them, or whatever. That seems the age for that sort of thing. So, I'm not sure if that was actually the beginning, but I have a suspicion, looking back on it now, that was probably the beginning. In school, grammar school and high school, I tended to be more scholastic than athletically inclined. I don't know why; that's just the way it was. I didn't particularly like sports, but I entered them. Some I preferred over others. The 100-yard dash and longer racing forms I was very good at and, because I was good at them, I enjoyed doing them. That sort of thing was okay, but I didn't care for combative sports like football, basketball and baseball. It was just something I had to do because it was the season of the year it was done. After school when I was on my own, I didn't really go out into the back lot and play ball with the guys because I was always doing something in school, after school activities, or working. At age 13 I essentially became nearly self-supporting except for room and board. So, I did a lot of work and that sort of thing. I think that when I was probably about 14, I had my first actual homosexual experience. And interestingly, it was with an uncle who was 21. Out of this thing, which was ongoing for a couple of years, I had

a discussion with a very close friend of mine about it. The friend was somebody that I had been very, very close to through grade school and up to this point in time, and that closeness continued on through high school. After high school, our ways separated. We were still close, but it was from a distance, not close proximity, not a day to day association. I felt I was close enough to him to discuss this thing and discovered that he was also having a similar type of situation with cousins and so forth. And we began to pool our information and discovered that it was kind of neat and interesting, naughty and so forth. At that time, I guess, I was just taking it in stride that sex was a new thing for me, and whether you did it with a guy or a gal wasn't particularly important; it was just a neat thing to learn about and do something about. In reflecting on what happened, in looking back on it, I didn't realize what was going on in terms of my own homosexuality. I always, through high school, had great personal associations with guys, not really engaging in a lot of sexual things, just having a great interest in them and feeling very comfortable with dealing with them. I had lots of feelings about women, and while I wasn't uncomfortable with them, I just wasn't as close in dealings with women as I was with men. And this continued after high school when I went back to Chicago to enter my denomination's college and seminary. At that time I had to determine whether I would go into the ministry. I continued to deal with this. There were little inuendoes from certain people that I could pick up on, you know, and could have gotten myself in homosexual relations with them. But I didn't, because I had always been very close to God, and I had had close identity with the church, and because of the church's teaching and its very definite anti-homosexuality teachings, I just knew I couldn't let it happen. I didn't allow any of these early years experiences progress. And when little possibilities or little gay openings would arise, at that period in time, I would ignore them. Consequently, I went through a period of time that I would call somewhat celibate, that is, celibate in so far as sexual interrelationships with other people, male or female, was concerned. I also felt that my peers were dating women and that maybe I should do likewise. So, I had some dates. They were fun but also not all that interesting. So, I was kind of forcing myself to do some things that I didn't have all that much fun in doing. I think that after those years in seminary, when I got out into the world of church work, I discovered much the same thing happening. I didn't really have time to date, because I was getting into the work of the church. I was doing a lot of things and spending lots of time doing them. But, being unmarried, I could give the church a lot of time and energy and so forth. And probably, unknowingly, I was doing so much because I wanted to keep "this thing" that I was concerned about, "this little thing" that I kept learning more about in listening to people and reading and so on, "this thing" in my life that I sensed was there but didn't want to be there, from surfacing. I spent a lot of time and energy on the church and really supported that faith. I wasn't a practicing sexual person

during those years. I wasn't married, and being a minister, I obviously could not have extracurricular activity with male or female; it could well come back to haunt me. I guess also my firm relationship with God and with the church had a lot of influence on what I did or didn't do at the time. Finally, when I had been in the ministry for several years, I just got so tired - physically, emotionally, and mentally - that I decided that I'd have to step out of the church for awhile. So, when I came to the end of my last church pastorate, which was evangelical, I decided that I would take off for a couple of years. I felt I would take a secular job, get away from the church, and thereby kind of rebuild and recharge myself.

Kus: That was in the late '50's?

Troy: Right. I think that this was happening in about 1958 or '59 that I took a leave from the church. During those two years I did indeed find a job down in Seattle, and I kept my residence in the town where my last church was. That involved a lot of commuting back and forth. So, not having to spend all that time with church activities, I discovered that in the non-working hours I had a lot of extra time to do whatever. I was beginning to hear and beginning to realize that there were gay people out there. They weren't called "gay people" at that time. But they were around, and I had an inclination to check it out. I did. I found a little piece of information here and a little piece of information there. I also discovered that gay people could probably be found in the parks, on the beaches, and in the bars. There were bars downtown that were gay, so I found the name of one and went there. I began to frequent these places and did indeed find that there were some gay people there. I was willing to keep on going back, you know. I went back and went back. As I was doing this, it was not just finding out that they were there and that they really existed, but rather, I was beginning to have a comfortable gay identity. I was not saying that I was gay, but I was having a comfortable identity being with these people and doing what I was doing, even to the point of becoming sexually involved with them. Well, as this happened, I began to realize that my identity with the church and my identity with God was peeling. This was because the church had taught very definitely that you could not be homosexual or practice homosexuality and be in the right relationship with God at the same time. You were sinning. You were a sinful person. And that had to be resolved. And so, by my decision to do these things and my willingness to continue to do them, I realized that I was alienating myself from God, and I didn't like it. It was a very tough thing to do, and yet the pull of this "other thing" was greater at that point in time. Maybe it was because I was in such a weakened physical and emotional state from exhaustion, maybe. I don't know. And maybe I used that rationalization for a crutch as to what was happening. It's always puzzled me with all my strong education and the strong teachings of the church and my understanding

of it, just why in that period of time while I was out of the actual ministry of the church, I not only allowed this to happen but to actually seek it out and not stop it. It's very interesting. I've looked back many times and tried to determine in my mind, you know, from a backward look, what really was taking place. And it's kind of a puzzle to me.

Kus: Were you feeling much guilt at this time?

Troy: Yes in that I felt I was alienating myself from God and was alienating myself from the church and, if I continued to do this sort of thing, it was going to be the end of my ministry, and it was going to be not a two-year secular job, but on-going maybe forever secular work. And there was my ministry, you know, I had spent a great deal of time preparing for it. I was extremely comfortable and happy how God really used me in the ministry, and here I was leaving all of that for this "silly little business" of what I was doing, you know? But I let it happen. And I knew, at one point, that I was alienated from God. I was alienated from the church because I had allowed it to happen to the point that I was very comfortable in that, and consequently, with the teaching of my background, then I could no longer be a child of God or a part of the church. And so, instead of being out of the ministry for a couple of years, I found that I had about 7 years that I call my "in-between years." That was in between the time that I left the last church and my first identification with the M.C.C. in Seattle. In those "in-between" years, I became more and more involved with gay people and the activities. And finally, in the last 2 years before M.C.C. came into existence here in Seattle, which was in May of 1972, I was discovering that some of the people that I was meeting were in different places than where I had first met them, and I was beginning to meet people that were doing things as gay people that were constructive instead of merely hanging out at the bars all the time.

Kus: Such as?

Troy: Well, it was a combination of things. I can't recall exactly, but I think I found some pamphlets in the bars advertising certain things that were happening in the community, a community project or constructive things happening in the community. When I say "constructive" I mean not just simply a bar, bath, beach, or park type activity, which I always considered pretty much sexually-oriented. I also knew of constructive things happening on the gay scene because of the fact that I went down to First Avenue and frequented the bookstores down there. I was a great reader. I've always been. I picked up probably every gay book that was published as soon as it came on the rack down there. And I also began discovering gay magazines and newspapers. I still have some of the old, old magazines from the '50's and early '60's that were

published by ONE, Inc., which was probably one of the oldest gay organizations around. I've still got them in my files from those years of picking them up. I think that COLUMNS N.W. was doing its thing at that time, and I probably picked up some copies of that and discovered that there were some other things happening around town after that. One of the things I discovered someplace, and I don't remember exactly where, was that a community center was being started at 102 Cherry Street. Being a frequenter of the bars at that time, I knew pretty much where that was. So, I went down there occasionally, looked around and observed, and I looked at the bulletin board. I think that it was there that I discovered that there was a notice on the bulletin board that they were having a religious meeting on Sunday afternoon at 4 p.m. or were going to start such a thing. So, I thought, that's kind of interesting; I think I'll hit this and I did. Tom (fictitious name) was putting together this little religious thing that happened - I'm not sure if it was every Sunday or if it was once a month - but it was happening. I recall one Sunday he had Jeff (fict. name) from a Unitarian church; I remember Jeff because I've had dealings with him since then in M.C.C. But Tom had different people- so I got to know Tom, I got to know some other people involved, and I got involved in some community things at that point. Consequently, when I first read about the M.C.C. happening down in Los Angeles in THE ADVOCATE, it was interesting to me. And when I read in THE ADVOCATE and in local papers and on the radio that there was to be an MCC started here in Seattle, it was of great interest to me. I didn't want to be identified with it, though, because that was the church, and I knew I was alienated from the church and from God. And I wasn't too sure about this whole thing about a gay church as it was called. I thought that the idea of a "gay church" was probably a bigger sacrilege than just having turned my back on God per se. But, because of my background and so forth, I thought, well, that's interesting. I'm going to go and see what it's all about. So, I read the papers and listened to the radio and followed what was happening right down that week before. On the Thursday before the Sunday they were going to have this religious meeting, I had heard they were not going to have it at the Broadway theater as they had originally planned; the manager had gotten excited or tense or something, and they couldn't meet there. And by following the papers and radio, I learned that they had an offer from the Capitol Hill Methodist Church to use the church building at least for awhile until they determined what they wanted to do and where they wanted to meet and so forth. So, on that Thursday night, I got in my car and came up to this district to determine for sure where Capitol Hill Methodist Church was, where this meeting was going to be. On Sunday afternoon, I came up and parked my car on 15th Avenue. I was very closety. I had always been very closety, and this began from the very first inclination that I might be dealing with something that might be a problem in my life when I was in the early days of my ministry through the days of leaving the church even and going into secular work when I started to discover the gay

community and gays. My closet walls all during that time were very high, built very strong and well, and I didn't even peek over the top of them until having left the church. So, when I came here, I was still very closeted, and I parked over on 15th so that if anyone saw me get out of my car and come this way to the church, they would assume I was going to the hospital. I walked through the hospital, and coming out of this side of it, I saw a busy C.H.M.C. It was nearly 2 p.m. I saw some people going upstairs into the church and to me it seemed very obviously the type of people who would be coming to the place I thought I was going to. I've told this story many times because it's not only what happened that Sunday that's important, but rather, I think it portrays pretty much what a closeted person would do at that point in time. I came up the stairs, and I couldn't do it. I thought, God, those people over in the hospital - patients, visitors, personnel, whatever, maybe somebody I even know - will see me going in here with all this publicity and so forth. They'll know exactly who I am and what I am. And I couldn't do it. I walked right past the church and went to the other end of the block here to this apartment house. And, at that corner, I stopped. And as I think about it now, I would say that destiny hung in the balance. Because at that point, I had to make up my mind whether to come back and try again to enter the church, or whether I should go on around the block and over to 15th and get in my car and leave. And I turned around and came back and got in front of those steps. I hurried up them like a rabbit and through that front door, hoping to God that no one saw me. And by that time, I was a wee bit late, and they were already singing the first hymn as I was going across the porch. When I was the distance of where the steps cross the porch in the entrance, they were singing an old hymn of the church. And I recognized it immediately; it was a beloved old hymn that I liked. The thought that went through my mind was, My God, listen to those queers sing that beautiful old hymn of the church!

Kus: What was the hymn?

Troy: I can't remember now, but I have a little bulletin from that day, so I could look it up. I came in and sat in the back pew. That said to me that I was there but not part of this service. I was strictly observing. Observe I did. And when the service was over, before I could get out the door, I had a few handshakes and "welcomes" and so forth, and would I like to come down to the coffee hour. No, thank you. And after a couple of Sundays, I did go down to the coffee hour. And I think about the same time, I also started going to the evening services which they had announced they had started. By the time I had come to MCC for a month or a month and a half, I really had gotten to a place where I felt that it wasn't too bad. I kind of liked what I was seeing and feeling and experiencing. So one Sunday evening, I think it was during a coffee hour, I went up to the Rev. Cal (fict. name), the Pastor, and I

said, "Cal, I have been a minister for many, many years, and I kind of like what I'm seeing here, and I like what I'm experiencing. I guess I'd be willing to help you a little. I don't want to get involved much, but I'm willing to help you a bit if you have some area that you need some help in." About 2½ or 3 years later, I had become the pastor here. Cal was here 2 years, and after he left, I became pastor after serving as his assistant. Cal came back here after I had been the pastor, and he reminded the congregation when he spoke in the service of this time when I came up and said I would be willing to help a little but I didn't really want to get involved. And he said, "Now look at him!" (Laughter) It was kind of neat. Well, anyway, in the beginning of my involvement, he, being the type of person he was, and the church being in its formative pains of birth, I think within a week they had me into the diaconate and charging the diaconate. And by July I was his assistant pastor. And in August, when the Universal Fellowship of MCC had its annual general conference in L.A., I went down for the purpose of applying for license in MCC. I had gone that far that fast. And, indeed, I was accepted. So, that pretty much tells you where I came from and where I was up to MCC.

Kus: So your closet days were over then?

Troy: No. In those early days of MCC involvement, I was still right in the closet, because I was still doing a secular job and had about 90% straights and only 10% gays as acquaintances. At least as far as I was concerned, coming out of my background, the things I had to deal with, I was not going to let those friends of mine know that I was gay until I really began to get involved in the gay community and the gay lifestyle. So, the early days of the church were very, very uncomfortable times for me, dealing with my desire to be open and yet my determination that I was not going to let those walls come down. Very, very difficult. But, I was determined it would happen. And as much as I would let it, it did happen. Slowly, brick by brick, it came down. And that's the way it was. I didn't let it happen overnight; it came down brick by brick. And even to this day, I can sense that there are little walls that are still kind of there, you know. It's really hard when you've built so well for so long. You know, Bob, I'm just so absolutely open and known, that you couldn't believe there's a closet wall. Yet, sometimes with certain people, particularly people that I met from my old denomination church, that closet wall is up. I'm not sure that I really want to deal with that, with them.

Kus: Have you ever told your family?

Troy: I've never told my family. My mother passed away in the late '60's, and I'm sure that she never ever had any inclination. I could be wrong, because having talked to people now and listened to parents talk, you know- makes me wonder if she knew. But I think that due

to the lack of knowledge on that subject at that point in time, and due to my covering of myself and my inclinations, I don't think she ever knew. When I became pastor of the church in 1974, there was a great deal of media publicity - papers, TV, radio, the whole thing. And at that time, my closet walls got a terrible blasting. I was installed on the 10th of June, and by the first part of July, I think it was, I had a call from my oldest sister. I had already been involved in the church for 2 years, and after having been installed with all this publicity blast, it kind of was out and around. And she had a conversation, as she does occasionally when she calls me up. But the thing amazing about this conversation was the number of times she said she loved me. Either I was super sensitive or in fact it [accepting the gayness] was happening. And I think it was happening. Right after the conversation was concluded, I sat back and analyzed the number of times she said she loved me. She has said that before, of course, but we have never really been the type of people who verbalize affection that much; rather, we show our affection more than verbalize it. And I couldn't understand why she was saying that, and that puzzled me, because I was sure that they were 1,100 miles away, you know, and I was way up here. And even with all the publicity, it couldn't have gotten down there. However, later I discovered that I had a shirt-tail relative here who was funneling info down to the family. And I'm pretty sure they got the information. It's never been discussed; all I'm doing is assuming. But I stayed away from my family pretty much for maybe 6 years before MCC and post-MCC. And the first time I really had a chance to have any contact with them, it was by phone in, I think, 1975 or 1976 when the northwest district of MCC was having their spring conference in California. It was held only 60 miles from my hometown, so I thought I'd go down then and visit my family. My dad is still living. I have three sisters who are all married and have youngsters. So, there's quite a little family unit there plus all of my aunts and uncles and other people in that area living. Andy, who I had met and already had entered into a Holy Union with, went with me. They got us from Sacramento to catch a plane, the best connection through-flight to Seattle, a 90-mile drive. We sensed that my oldest sister's husband, my brother-in-law, said a time or two things which indicated that they knew what the situation was. So, it's never been discussed. I have never told them. They have never said anything about it. There has been no inclination on either part to discuss this. But, I'm just assuming, and I think very correctly, that they knew and don't care. Andy and I have been down there twice. They have verbalized on the phone and have written in letters to be sure to tell Andy hello and be sure to bring him along next time I come down. So, it just says to me that they know, and they don't care. That's the way I've dealt with it. It's comfortable for me. I'm at the point now that if it came out in the open, and it had to be discussed and verbalized, I could handle it very well. They don't make any indication that they want to discuss it, so I'm not going

to embarrass them by saying, "Hey, folks, I've got something I want to talk to you about." So, that's kind of the way it comes out.

Kus: So, Troy, you've dealt in your ministry with a lot of gay folks and their coming out processes?

Troy: In MCC? You bet!

Kus: If a gay person came up to you and was trying to hassle with the notion of coming out to their folks, what kind of advice would you give them?

Troy: There is no set standard of approaching that. I pretty much try to sit down and spend an hour or two or maybe more than one session to know that person if I don't already know them, to discover what their background is as intimately as I can. Usually people are very open with me, so it's not that difficult to get a sense of their background...to know their parents maybe without ever having met them, to know who they are, know where they're coming from, how they would maybe handle themselves with this type of thing, and so forth. Then, after having gotten as much information as I could, I'd say, "Okay, here are some possible ways of handling it." I would suggest that maybe the person should consider this, or maybe they should not consider doing it this way. "You, ultimately," I would say, "have to do it [come out to parents], but these are my observations, these are things I think I sense, and these are things I'd suggest maybe you do or don't do." I've never had a set criteria. I spend a lot of time. I feel it's very important to spend a lot of time because this is a very crucial moment in their life, and the decision is one which they'll have to live with forever. And I want to be sure that whatever suggestions or advice I'd give them is just as carefully analyzed and just as sure of doing the right thing as is possible to do. Sometimes it works out well, sometimes it doesn't. The vagaries of human nature are such that you're never positive what kind of reaction you're going to get. And I think that usually, if I had my druthers, I'd try to caution them to take the soft, careful approach in coming out to family, somewhat like I have done, although I never verbally came out really to my folks or family. I don't advocate that they necessarily should not either. But I would say that they need to be very careful and be sure, before they actually sit down and say, "Hey, mom and dad," that they feel that it is something they're pretty sure their folks can handle. Don't lay it on them unless they're pretty sure the folks are ready for it. If they're not ready for it, try to build up to it. Don't do it now. If you possibly can, try to lay down some framework, lay some little subtleties or something that will build them up to the point where they are ready for it.

Kus: What kind of subtleties? Like talking about your same-sex friends a lot during conversations?

Troy: Yeah, or talking about some of the things you're doing. Or if the parents are talking about gay people or something they read in the paper about gays, try to be educational in your response by being supportive of the gay people or supportive of the fact that God has created all kinds of people, and gay people are part of God's creation. If it's a crime being discussed from the news, then try to educate them by saying, "Yes, but I don't think it's fair to say all gay people are bad because one person is bad, because there's just as much of a varied structure from bad to good in the gay society as there is in society generally, you know." And so, there's a chance to do some education and if they sense that you're trying to be neutral and maybe a little pro, that may start to say something, at least make them start to wonder what or who you are. Things like that.

Kus: One of the things I've been discovering is that coming out can be a very long process for the gay person. Often they've had to deal with lots of notions, often they've done a lot of reading, talking, experimenting, living. And at the moment they tell their parents, their parents then begin the process of coming out in a way. Have you observed that process with parents?

Troy: Let me say a few things on this. Sometimes I deal with people who had already come out and it's been very traumatic. They come up here wounded, scared, frightened, angry, whatever the situation may be, and I have to deal with them post-mortem, so to speak. Sometimes I get involved with the parents, not just the gay people who come to see me, mainly because of my willingness to go out to the parents by phone or in person. Usually I do it by phone first to see where the temperature of the water is (laughs) before I go out to actually see them face to face. So, I have dealt with parents, and I've worked with parents, and I've worked with both sides of the issue many, many times. Sometimes I've found parents who were very upset, very hurt, but that they are willing to try and understand. That, to me, is a major step just being willing to try to understand. They may not understand now, but they are willing to try, and that says a lot. And that usually goes a long way towards acceptance at some point in time. The ones that are hysterically upset, the ones that absolutely will not listen to reason, will not condone it, will not do anything, will not, will not, are the people that usually down the road are still alienated - child from parent.

Kus: So, some parents never go through coming out?

Troy: No. That's what I'm saying. They will not allow themselves to for different reasons.

Kus: Would you say that's a minority?

Troy: Yes. Lots of times I have had people tell me that when they came right down to the moment of telling their parents, their parents will react by saying, "So, what else is new? We were wondering when you were going to tell us." You know, that sort of thing.

Kus: One of the things I've heard a lot of people talk about is a thing called "gay sensitivity." Or gays are more sensitive than straights. What is meant by that?

Troy: I've thought that too. And I've puzzled over it a great deal, and I've had a theory that it's probably true. But, I've gone to the other side and said it's not true. It really bothered me (laughs) and I think it's because of the fact that I have tried to sense gay people to be no different than straight people except for their sexual inclination, that sexuality is just a part of the total being. And because I have felt so strongly that way and have tried to teach and encourage it so strongly, when you say that gay people have a gay sensitivity, it's kind of contrary to what I have felt and tried to be educative about. So, I think that's one reason I have handled it so crudely. So, I think there probably is, at least with some gay people - and maybe in subtle sorts of ways maybe all gay people - maybe a little more of a gay sensitivity. There is that possibility. I'm allowing myself to believe that. And I think that is probably true because with some gay people you will find there are artists, musicians, painters, interior decorators, people who are creative. Not entirely, obviously, but in many instances these people come out of gay lifestyles. There is a sensitivity there of a sense, you know. So, I'm beginning to realize that there is something there. I'm not throwing away my theory [that gays are the same as straights except in sense of sexual inclination]. I sense that my theory is a correct one, and I've held it and taught it for a long time. But, I'm at least willing to let down on the barrier a bit and realize that I think that statement [gays have a "gay sensitivity"] has more truth than at one time I was willing to believe. I really do. And I'm wondering also that even with the people who are not into those creative arts, maybe also they might have a little more of a sensitivity possibly because of what they have had to deal with, with what they have had to come to grips with, that made them more sensitive. I think that the compassion of this MCC church, for example, is probably greater than the compassion and the sensitivity of many mainline churches because of the fact of what we've experienced and what we sense another person is dealing with and is experiencing now. So, there probably is a spiritual sensitivity there that maybe is a little more acutely defined and made more aware of in the gay person because of what they may have gone through and what they've sensed and come to grips with ultimately.

Kus: Troy, that about ends the questions that I have unless you have some other things you'd like to say.

Troy: I suppose when I come to the end of an interview like this, I always sit down afterwards and think of all the things that come in- to my mind that I wish I had said, you know, things that I wished I had covered. But I think essentially what I've tried to do is to condense a lifetime into a few minutes, and so, that's what this is, an overview.

Kus: I thank you for your interview!

Interview #2 - Casey, age 66, retired railroad employee.

This interview is presented here in its entirety because Casey is the oldest of the informants and because he "came out sexually" in Texas many, many years before gay liberation. His story gives one a sense of perspective or history, especially important for young urban gays who came out in post-Stonewall times. This is also the story of a most compassionate man with a heart of gold and a most remarkable sensitivity to others.

Kus: Casey, please give me a bit of your background.

Casey: I was raised as an only child and, consequently, somewhat was lonely. And like many other kids, way back in childhood I had an imaginary playmate who was a beautiful blond boy. I can't say that my imagery of him was sexual or romantic, but I think it probably was. It was sort of an idealized sort of thing. But I was a rather lonely kid who was big and awkward, overweight, not very well adjusted to my peer group as they call them today. I was much happier in the company of adults all through childhood and adolescence. I was very shy.

Kus: When did you think you were gay?

Casey: Well, do you mean by that accepting myself as gay?

Kus: No. When did you label yourself?

Casey: Well, I went through a long period of homosexual activity, but I kidded myself into thinking this was a special friendship. So, I was having all these homosexual experiences, but I didn't label myself as such.

Kus: How old were you at that time?

Casey: I'd had a relationship with another high school junior which involved sex, and I guess you could say we were lovers. I never thought of it that way at the time, but we were exclusive with each other. He went away, and I went to college. During college, I had a good many relationships, mostly mutual masturbation and things like that. Anyway, eventually I got my teaching certificate and began teaching. At the age of 26, the second year I taught school, an older teacher that I'd had in high school welcomed me to the town where both he and I would be teaching that year. He sent over to my hotel room a friend of his who was very actively homosexual. I

should point out, that when I was 17 and in high school, I had written a series of love poems to this teacher. Anyway, after meeting the person the teacher sent him to welcome me to town, I thought about it for a few days. Then, I remember looking at myself and thinking - well, you're queer. That's the way it is. So what. Let's make a good life out of it.

Kus: That was at age 26?

Casey: Yeah.

Kus: How long did it take you before you accepted being gay as a positive thing from the time you labeled yourself as such?

Casey: Well, I think right away I had no desire or instinct to turn back or to regret it. But I did have lots of problems with it.

Kus: What kind of problems?

Casey: Well, in Texas in 1937, you can, and I don't think I have to belabor your imagination as to what it was like at that time. How furtive! How closeted! How straight you had to be, especially considering I was teaching school! First thing I did within a month after I "came out" was fraught with falling in love with another fellow who belonged to someone else. So I spent the first year in the throws of an unrequited one-way love affair. This was, though, very educative. And from then on, there was never any problem with sexual orientation.

Kus: Did you feel any guilt about it?

Casey: Not really. I might have had some qualms, but I think anybody with a childhood of upbringing in the Christian ethic, particularly in a Calvinist frame of reference, is going to have some second thoughts. But I dealt with it as best I could. I can't tell you when I finally realized that God loves me just as well as He loves the next one. But, outside of secretiveness and closeting and lies, I never did have an emotionally bad time of homosexuality. Once I accepted it, that was it. That's a trait of mine. Once I finally reach a point, I'm very strong and determined and ongoing. I'm not much of a one to turn back and have qualms about things.

Kus: During this time, did you "come out" in terms of disclosure?

Casey: No. Most of that period is very secretive, closeted. And we had, and gay people still do, that uncanny smelling each other out. And this is something I mentioned

to you before. Sometime in the future, I'll let you write a biographical history of what Texas was like in those days. Gay life in West Texas in the Year of our Lord, 1937; it's a whole historical document, that 600 some odd miles from Fort Worth to El Paso. I think every gay person in that area along Highway 80 and the Texas and City Railroad knew each other. All of them had been together at one time or another, and we celebrated the opportunity to meet and get together and made little pilgrimages to meet other people we heard about. I can give you a specific example. I heard about a character named D.W. who was supposed to be quite macho and very nice who worked in a shoestore in Pecos. And I made the trip to see him, to spend the night with him. And we did those things in those days. Catch a train and travel for adventure. But the society was closed; we didn't reveal ourselves to straight people.

Kus: How did you know each other?

Casey: Partly by reputation. One gay person knew all the "fraternity brothers" in the area. And one by one we met. There was some cruising - a good deal of it actually - in the Greyhound Bus Depot in Abilene, for instance, and it was presided over by a fellow that I realize now must have been the Queen Bee of West Texas. Everybody knew him. And he acted as sort of a clearing house of information. I've heard the same kind of legends about Colorado Springs and just about any other city. The last year I taught school, I got involved with some pulp magazines which had letter columns for lonely people who wanted pen pals. And the letters were very easy to decipher. "I'm a single man in Joplin, Missouri and am interested in art and travel and music." A perfectly straight, macho man did not write letters to pen pals in those days. So, it was obvious. The word was spread, believe me, and the grapevine flourished and was very active. But you had to go to places where homosexuals gathered. You had to always have a careful, careful, careful guard up against the world in general.

Kus: Did your parents know you were gay?

Casey: My mother might have assumed it. She lived with me during the year I had this one-way love affair. And I wouldn't put it past her to have read my mail, but I usually carried it around in my pocket to keep her from reading it. And I did it to protect her as much as me; I didn't think she could handle it, and I wanted privacy. I've had a singularly unbad time about all this. I don't know if I was lucky or just discreet. Believe me, being a minister's kid and a public school teacher's kid in a small town in that period who was gay had better be a good hypocrite!

Kus: During these years, you were active in church affairs, right?

Casey: Not really very much. After I got away from home, I taught a Sunday School class one year, and that was a little matter of politics between my mother and me. She was trying to prevent me from becoming an Episcopalian, so she railroaded me into teaching in the Presbyterian church about which I had almost no conviction nor feeling for at all. And one time, I got myself baptized in the Catholic church mainly because of a friend of mine who I loved. And, if I hadn't been as intentionally Protestant as I was, I could have digested Catholicism, but I didn't. But I did gain a sense of beauty and liturgy from the Catholics. And now, years later, I've finally come full circle to a feeling that Catholics are close brothers of mine. Anyway, there was a long period I wasn't active in church.

Kus: Did this have anything to do with your being gay?

Casey: I don't think so. I think it was just a stage. I've come full circle now. In my later years, I was in the Episcopal church, and for the last year and a half, I've been in M.C.C. and very active.

Kus: Do you think that part of coming out is abandoning religion?

Casey: I think a lot of younger people have been so influence by secular society, that they've been alienated from the church as soon as it says anything about homosexuality. They alienated themselves, or disfranchised themselves, because it was apparent that the old mainline churches weren't going to accept them. But now, they're doing an about face, the churches are. They're beginning to accept gays. I think the end is not yet seen.

Kus: Since you've lived in Seattle and became so involved in the M.C.C., are most of your friends gay now?

Casey: I've always maintained, because of my work and my adult gregariousness, a pretty well-mixed group of friends. I've got more gay friends now, but I've kept all the old friends. I just make many more gay friends now. So, the proportion is changing, not abandoning one, but increasing the other. I personally feel we all need both kind of friends - straight and gay. There is no fundamental difference between us.

Kus: Casey, do you find any benefits to coming out?

Casey: The benefit of coming out is being free to be honest with and about yourself. And now that we're reaching a kind of society where you can be yourself, I think it's just a wonderful

thing. In Seattle, for instance, we fought against the anti-gay initiative, 13. And we did it together. The church was supporting the gays, the gay groups were supporting the gays. It was the most beautiful sociological document I've ever seen. We're making it work. And of course, like I'm sure you are, I'm inordinately proud of Seattle as having been one of the places it first worked. I can give you an example along that line. My next door neighbor is the best neighbor I've had, and I've had him for 14 years. He's a native of South Carolina, a devout Methodist layman, and an organizer for the Teamsters; now if that isn't a combination if I ever saw one! And he's the only person in Seattle I worried about revealing myself to. And last fall, he and his wife had their 25th wedding anniversary party. And he walked up to me and said, "What do you think of Initiative 13?" And I thought, here it comes. And I told him I was against 13, and he felt the same way about it. And I said, "Bill, has it ever occurred to you," and I thought - here goes nothing - "to wonder about my lifestyle?" "Well, I assume you're gay. So, I acted like it didn't make any difference what your sexual life is. You're a good neighbor and a good friend." About a thousand pounds fell off my shoulders at that point. And I've never been put down or been rejected by anyone I've told I was gay. That's what's so wonderful about Seattle... or one of the things.

Kus: Is it hard to find gay men in the over-50 age group?

Casey: It's hard to find if you let yourself be bound by a whole bunch of stereotype ideas. For example, one stereotype is that when you're 60 years old, nobody wants you or have sex with you. This isn't true. There's a small but devoted group of younger gays who like older men. And there's plenty of men your own age who are in need of companionship and/or sex. And if you're not obsessed with youth, you realize there are a lot of beautiful older people around that have a reasonable amount of physical beauty, a great deal of knowledge, and a rich sense of personality and experience. There are all kinds of such folks around. So, if you're 60, if you can rid yourself of all these youth stereotypes and relax and live and let it all hang out, you have a good chance of being happy. And I've been very fulfilled. So, I guess that's why I try to help other men my age and give them my experience. And in the book LOVING SOMEONE GAY by Don Clark in the middle of it somewhere, it deals with the reasons it's good to associate with older people. If you don't, what you're doing is denigrating what you're soon going to become. In other words, you're denying your birthright that you should come into when you reach the age of these people.

Kus: Is there anything else we didn't cover and you'd like to talk about?

Casey: I think I've said everything I can think of. Except I am convinced of this one thing, that for an older person, and I think this applies more to men than to women but I don't know why, you must get rid of the preconceived notions that you're old and undesirable and that nobody wants you and you don't have anything to offer. It's plainly not true. But it seems hard for most people to see.

Kus: Thank you for the interview.

Interview #3 - Carol & Evelyn, ages 35 & 29, Nurse-Counselor and Clinical Audiologist respectively.

A good portion of the interview with Carol and Evelyn is presented here. Because of the length of this, my only couples interview, some was trimmed for presentation.

Carol and Evelyn are two women who have a very enviable relationship, are deeply in love with their jobs, and very excited about life.

Kus: Carol, would you give me a bit of background of yourself, where you came from and where you are now?

Carol: I'm from a small town in Western Maryland. My family comprised my mother and father who are still living together and very happily married and good friends. I have a younger brother aged 29, another brother 22, and a sister who's 15 and is Mongoloid. I went to nursing school because my family didn't have enough money to send me to a regular university or college, and I couldn't make money enough money for that. But I did make money to go to nursing school. After graduation, I worked in psychiatric nursing in a large state hospital where I was in charge and had great responsibilities. Sometimes I was in charge of 1800 patients by myself for a weekend with a doctor who would be off the hospital grounds. I was in charge of admissions and just about everything. So, at an early age, I felt I had a great responsibility within my career. I moved from the area to Chicago then to Seattle. I'm now in private practice seeing well-functioning people, and my clients are 60% gay and 40% straights, about the same number of men and women.

Kus: Evelyn, how about you?

Evelyn: I came from a small town in Wisconsin and have a mother and father who still live there, and I've got a little brother. My father is a businessman who started out as a grocer and sort of began an American Dream in a sense. I was very interested in the theater and did a lot of theater work during high school. I was a good student and very active. Went off to college in '67 and came to Seattle by myself. I changed ideas and went into speech and hearing therapy and got my degrees. Finished school in '74, met Carol in '73, and I've been living with her ever since. Now I'm working as a Clinical Audiologist at a hearing center.

Kus: Eve, would you talk a bit about coming out to your parents?

Evelyn: In '67, I started having a relationship with a woman, and in '71 or '72 it started getting rocky because of basically being young and not having met gay people. She got married, so my parents saw the hell I went through at the time. My parents saw me through a very grueling time. I was crying a lot because of that, and my self-esteem went way down. Eventually I had to make a break with that person. And finally I got to meet other gay people and had some brief relationships until I met Carol. So, before Carol, I wasn't seeing everything with a 360 degree scope. My mother asked me if I was involved with Carol. I hadn't wanted to implicate myself, because I didn't think my mother could handle it, which I think was right, because of her depressive side to her. So, when she asked me outrightly, I didn't want to lie to her, so I said, "Yeah." Well, I guess my mother didn't tell my father but moped around so much carrying this bit of information that my father called me up a couple of times to see if he could find out why my mother was so depressed. And once he called me up to ask why mother was so sad, and I said I didn't know, I'm fine. (Laughter) And I was. In fact, I was better than I ever was. And he said, "Well, I'm coming over tomorrow." from the Midwest; he was going to fly out. "I want to talk with you."

Kus: Did your parents not live with each other?

Evelyn: No, they lived together. But my mother's very good. I had asked her to keep it confidential, and she did. Anyway, my father flew out and took a room at the University Towers because I was still doing my graduate work. So, at dinner, I felt like he was giving me the third degree. I guess my mother was much worse off than she sounded over the phone as he was so worried. And finally I said, "Well, the only thing I can think of was that I told her I was gay the other day." (Laughter) And I started crying. It was such a traumatic thing to do. I would never had started crying today, you know, because I'm very proud I'm gay. But he was very calm. He said something I'll never forget. He said, "When I was behind a meat counter, the butcher block, I wouldn't have even understood you or what you're telling me. But I've gotten out in the world, and I know what you're telling me. And although I don't understand how this has happened, I will continue to support you emotionally and financially." And later I received big letters from both of them, separately. They stated their confusion about the whole thing which is understandable. But still, they had a lot of love for me and support which they've given to me with the best of their ability, far more than most people get. Then I finished my graduate work and Carol and I got together and began to

Evelyn: build our lives. Recently, my parents have been growing a lot. We, Carol and I, went back home to visit them last October. And while they greeted Carol warmly, they treated her more as my "friend" who they were going to take out to dinner and stuff like that. Carol and I did some talking about financial matters, and my father was able to understand that. But they sort of blocked out our relationship. But now, after I've been so sick, they have started to come around and are now beginning to include Carol in their phone calls. "Say hi to Carol." And just the other day, Carol got on the phone for the first time to them, and my dad said, "When we come out in April, we'll all go out to dinner." I think this trip may really help them get a better idea of our relationship. When I got sick, they came out here and were a little bit shocked at my gay friends as they had never met open gays before. But I think they're on their way towards acceptance.

Kus: Carol, how about you?

Carol: I decided to come out to my parents in '73. There was a kind of understanding there, but I wanted it to be verbal. Because I was very involved doing a lot of political stuff, speeches and things like that in the gay movement. And I thought it would be very unfair to them to hear it third hand, even though they were on the East Coast, you know, and there was a remote possibility...So, on one of my visits home, I told them that. The first thing my father said is, "Do you think we're stupid or something? Your mother and I've been talking about this since you've been 13." Which is kind of cute. So initially, they said some good things about it and asked appropriate questions or the usual kind of questions that people ask that don't know a lot about gay lifestyles. And then it was okay. But then my mother began having some trouble with it. Her main social sphere is the Church of God, and the anti-homosexual forces were kind of ginning up, and she was getting a lot of garbage from the church. Also, at the same time, my brother was getting a divorce, and my sister, the Mongoloid, was causing problems as they were having a hard time placing her in a school. So, they were dealing with an awful lot of things that required major shifts in values. So, they just kind of worked that stuff out for a couple of years. They were very honest with me always. And the visit home where I told them I was gay, Evelyn was supposed to meet me in my hometown and we'd go to Cape Cod for a vacation. My mother said could you please not bring Evelyn home with you. So, Evelyn didn't come to the house.

Kus: Did they get to meet her eventually?

Carol: Eventually. But for a year after they refused to allow Carol at their house, we kept communication to a minimum. And I was a little bit distressed, but they were working things out among themselves. I was kind of getting into a state of well, if they don't accept it, I'm just going to have to resign myself to the fact and not have contact with my family anymore. But after a certain amount of time, they began warming up on the phone, and I'd put Evelyn on and talk about Evelyn. And there were a lot of letters sent back and forth from my mother dealing with the gay issue. At one point, my wrote that we pray to God that me and Evelyn would be able to both find men and have a good life. And I'd write back, "Mother, you still don't understand." (Laughter) I'd say would you be telling my brother that you hope my brother and his wife would find other people? And I told her she would do no such thing. And she wrote back and said I was right, that she guessed she still didn't understand. Then, Evelyn and I invited them to come to visit us in Seattle and we paid for their plane tickets as they had so many hospital bills for my sister that the insurance didn't cover. And they hadn't had a vacation. So, they were a little hesitant at first, but they came out.

Evelyn: Also, we had your brother and sister-in-law out the year before, and they had pictures.

Carol: Yeah. My parents were hesitant at first because they didn't know what to expect. And my brother told them, "Look, go out there. You're not going to be in over your heads. See for yourself."

Evelyn: And your brother got remarried and your mother found out the new woman he married was much better for him than the first one. And it sort of made them think a bit. 'Cause the church was so against divorce and all. So I think that helped.

Carol: Yeah, I'm glad you brought that up. There was a lot of value shifting being done by my parents. And about this time, they started doing some radio work in regards to retarded children.

Evelyn: I think it's obvious from what you've said that your parents are very communicative, very verbal and very open.

Carol: Yeah, they talk about everything and try and think and work things out. So, they came out to Seattle to visit and it was just great. They met many of our friends, and they loved everybody they met. They saw us together, they saw how we lived, and they saw that it was really kind of a neat

Carol: life. And my mother came into the bedroom the morning before they left and said to us, "I want to apologize to you Evelyn for any kind of negative thoughts that I've had about the two of you." And she said, "I feel somewhat regretful of the time that was wasted, but I did need to do some changing." And she apologized to us for that, and she said, "And your friends, it would be just wonderful to go any place in the world with your friends!" My father put it a little more succinctly (laughter). He said, "Sure glad you're not running around with crumbs." (Laughter) They had the best time of their lives. Every phone conversation they still talk about it.

Evelyn: Just the other day your mother said they sort of love me and I'm sort of the best daughter-in-law they have now. Now they can see relationships, they don't discriminate between straight and gay. And when your mom visited, she said our relationship is much healthier than a lot of straight relationships she knows of.

Carol: Yeah, the relationships they see at the church.

Evelyn: They're really neat people though. And the other day I was talking to your mother on the phone, and she still is sad about that very first time when she didn't allow me to go to your house. And she regrets the lost time.

Carol: We'd just visited when Evelyn got sick, and I was in the kitchen and my mother came out and said, "You know Carol, someday I'm going to be able - I don't think it's going to be too long - but someday I'm going to be able to go to church and when people say "How's your daughter?" I'm going to be able to say, "My daughter's a homosexual, and she's very happy about this." (Laughter) We told her not to.

Kus: What a beautiful story. Tell me, now that you have both come out, what do you think of the process?

Carol: Well, I'd just like to say that the coming out process is character-building. And I think it's neat. And I almost feel that people that are much in the mainstream [straights] are deprived of something really beautiful by not having to go through something like that.

Evelyn: Well, yeah, that may be well and true, but I'm sort of real angry at the coming out process. I think that in the crucial years of my career planning and my education, I was going through a dating process that I should have been able to go through in high school. And I think that a lot of things were painful, and although they may have strengthened

Evelyn: my character in me, maybe other people aren't so strong. Like, I stuck around with a person while they got married and let my self-esteem go down, because of the coming out process, because I didn't know anything about being gay. And I'm really mad about that, because I don't like my self-esteem to go down. And it usually wouldn't. So, I think that there probably still could be a coming out process of some sort, but you know, it doesn't have to be so drastic on people. Particularly because gay people, since there are no role models, you don't go through a lot of things in high school, and people going through coming out in their 30's and 40's and 50's, their whole life can be an unnecessary struggle. And I think it's a crime!

Kus: One of the things that I wonder about is whether having two social movements going at the same time - gay and women - is a positive thing for lesbians. It would seem to me that lesbians could get support from 2 movements. What are your ideas on this?

Carol: I see that having both a women's movement and gay movement going at the same time has its disadvantages. It tends to fragment the gay community. What used to be so neat and supportive about the gay community was a kind of camaraderie that felt good. It felt good, it felt strong. And I think that the women's movement coming along at the same time is due to that. I've never made a conscious choice to choose the gay movement over the women's movement. I was involved in the gay movement first. I felt oppressed as a gay person, not as a woman. So, I feel they are both important, but most of my energy leans more toward the gay movement, the gay thrust.

Evelyn: Yeah, I think that's important, especially the last thing you said. I've never felt oppressed as a woman. I think a lot of gay women have, but I never did. I felt oppressed as a gay person though. My lifestyle would probably be considered a feminist lifestyle, but I'm not active in the women's movement. So, I guess you could say that I'm active in the women's movement by the way I live, but I'm very active in the gay movement.

Carol: I've seen the women's movement be destructive to some young women. Getting the rhetoric that because you're a woman you're strong. Using that rhetoric to feel strong without actually being strong or having experienced strength, can be destructive. This is also true of the gay movement. Just because you're gay doesn't make you strong. Yet, young gays often get caught up in the rhetoric of rap groups and never really internalize gay reality. They just spout out

Carol: what they've heard. You have to experience internally that
 gay is strong, gay is proud. If you haven't dealt with it
 on a personal level, all the rhetoric will simply be a mask.
 And that bothers me as a therapist.

Kus: I thank you both for the interview.